

Philosophies

Achieving modernity and contemporaneousness rests on
our aptitude for creation and initiative



Would you mention some of the problems those who are involved with philosophy in our Arab homeland face? How do these problems prevent them from practising philosophy in the right way?

Undoubtedly, the state of philosophy in the Arab homeland is as degraded as the political situation in this homeland. And that is because it is characterised by extreme imitation and blind dependence. It is rarely possible to find in the works of these philosophers a single philosophical theory that they have advanced without relying on either Eastern or Western philosophy.

This seems true even if they have camouflaged this imitation and dependency with labels that suggest renewal and innovation such as “their embrace of modernity” and support of “the principle of philosophical universalism”. They have failed to make any contributions to modern philosophy, be they at the levels of topic selection, aspect specifications, instrument design, or representation of results. This imitation is clearly elucidated in their mechanical repetition of all the issues that have afflicted the modern Western world, the most recent of which are “the new world order”, “globalisation”, and “heading toward the new millennium”.

Therefore, an Arab philosopher is an imitative thinker who can offer no new insights. He is a dependent learner who has no followers since he imitates others in all his practical decisions without raising any questions about the rationale and requirements of these decisions.

The principle of imitation is built on the premise that the concerns of Westerners should apply to the Arabs as well. This is a wrong principle given the obvious historical and discursive disparity between us and them. Thus, the imitative philosopher tends to support his views with evidence from his masters, as he is unable to prove the validity or invalidity of these views. He is inclined to justify his adoption and dissemination of their ideas and claims no

matter how harmful and unbeneficial they are to him. Arguably, the one who justifies what is made by others, unconscious of how it was made, or how to avoid its negative effects, is analogous to someone who gladly calls for his mind to be taken from him, rather than others taking it by force.

Such deep-seated imitation is liable to lead the philosopher to reckon serious diseases as ultimate cures and grave delusions as ultimate guidance.

I do not have enough space in this context to enumerate all these different flaws which vary in accordance with the different ranges of behaviour and levels of discourse the Arab philosopher has embraced. Thus, I will only mention two major flaws. The first one is related to his philosophical behaviour and the second one is concerned with his philosophical discourse.

The behavioural flaw concerns the confusion between philosophy and politics. This is a grave fallacy that requires extensive discussion beyond the scope of this book. This confusion dominates the work of many so-called “militant thinkers” who adopted hybrid and confused stances that have done serious harm to the Arab homeland. These stances neither reformed the thinking of individuals nor improved their actions. The intellectual corruption and shameful malfunctioning that have afflicted this nation are a stigma hurting every proud Arab or free Muslim. These sicknesses are brought about by the declarations of these intellectuals whose views alter, like chameleons, according to their changing interests. They disgracefully work out all elusive justifications for their tendentious behaviour and opportunistic attitudes.

The confusion between what is philosophical and what is political is based on the belief that the philosopher, like the scholar of politics (the man of politics or rather the politician), is interested in political phenomena. As a matter of fact, politicians are interested in the materialist reality of these phenomena, whereas philosophers are particularly concerned with their moral and ethical values. There is a clear difference between apolitical occurrence and political value. The former is an objective matter whose causes can be managed and whose transformation can be predicted, whereas the latter is a subjective matter that is governed by intention and is related to nothing save recompense. This shows that the philosopher has an exemplary approach to the political phenomenon, and the purpose of his approach is to reach an elevated status. Even if this is not practically achieved the way he wishes, it remains fundamentally an ethical approach. Nonetheless, in the world of politics, morals and ethical considerations are not by necessity present. And if morals are present in certain political acts, their presence will remain accidental rather than essential. The goal will not be these morals themselves, but they will be appropriated for other intentions.

I do not imagine, therefore, a philosopher running an election campaign with unrealisable promises. He cannot also set up a political party, support corrupt members, and oppose others who might be suitable for chief positions. One cannot imagine him occupying a political position and encountering situations that contradict his principles. Even if he really runs a campaign, founds a party, or occupies a position, I do not think he will succeed in any of these unless he consents to “being half a philosopher,” “quasi-philosopher,” or “someone who practises philosophy”. Otherwise, his true personality would be that of a politician disguised in philosopher’s clothing or a cunning person capable of assuming multiple personalities. To be a genuine philosopher is likened to picking thorns with a bare hand. The genuine philosopher is someone who can circumvent the controlling pressures of narrow personal or group interests as practised by the politician; he is someone who can adhere to the vast space of values that celebrate the perfection of the human being as embodied by Plato in his *Republic* or al-Farābī in his *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* (*The Perfect State*) or Ibn Bāja in *Tadbīr al-mutawaḥḥid* (*The Governance of the Solitary*).¹

The real philosopher is by nature a moralist or an ethicist. He does not alter his views or adhere to parties; he does not join parties of the left or the right; he does not negotiate, maneuver, conspire, or collude. He seeks the truth wherever and whenever it exists and is quite ready to embrace it even if it is pronounced by his opponent. Equally, it does not please him to come to the aid of those who agree with him when he does not find truth in their pronouncements. This is the kind of philosopher I want to be. By contrast, the politician is prone to change in line with all these different situations. He never seeks the truth in his opponents’ arguments, nor identifies falsehood in his supporters’ words as that could jeopardise his status. He does not feel guilty or bad when attributing falsehood to his opponents, even when their argument is right. Moreover, he can attribute truth to his supporters or patrons even when they have wrong views. I will never be a politician in this sense unless politics becomes something else.

It is absolutely incorrect to think that a philosopher is a negative person who does not participate in historical events and the process of change, as is often said. This can be elucidated in two ways:

Firstly, engaging in social events and participating in social change has no visible manifestations contrary to what the existing political organisations pur-

1 In *Mabādi’ ārā’ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila* (*The Perfect State*), Abū Naṣr al-Farābī claimed that philosophy had found a new meaning and life in the shelter of Islam. Philosophy was for him the guide to the liberty of ethical choices, which can lead to judicious reform of a ruling system and is the key to the perfect city-state.

port. Rather, they may have implicit manifestations. Does not the philosopher, who works diligently and constantly to improve minds and morals, participate in these events and social change generally? Certainly not! Can we equate his contribution to the one whose mission is limited to enhancing bodies and judgments?

Secondly, given the fact that the philosopher is concerned with all facets of human existence, how can one disregard his involvement with politics, which revolves around wielding authority over human existence? His preoccupation with politics is not limited to a certain position for the purpose of attaining power for one's own self, sharing power, or alternating it with others. Quite the contrary, his concern with power is approached from all positions in his country or in other countries. He traces its rules and developments; he enumerates its advantages and disadvantages in a way that elucidates lessons and evidence. This is supposed to sustain him in identifying the necessary values and goals for saving human beings from the harms that may ensue from political practice in this context. He, therefore, takes the responsibility of looking philosophically into and calling for these values and goals to bring about peace in people's minds. He can both save humanity from self-destruction and degradation and raise it to a level of greater perfection.

The rhetorical flaw that the imitative Arab philosopher faces is embodied in the separation between philosophy and logic. This fallacy is less serious than the damages caused by the confusion between politics and philosophy. It is not surprising that those thinkers who fall into this mix-up, call for such a separation between philosophy and logic. Confusion occurs when these thinkers succeed in weakening the logical capabilities of their audience.

There are two actual reasons behind their call for separating philosophy and logic. The first one is germane to their incorrect view of logic, which they consider an extraneous and disposable element for philosophy. Indeed, there is no possible knowledge—philosophical or not—in the absence of a controlling logic. The content of philosophy entails the existence of a certain method which is, in essence, its controlling logic. Thus, philosophy, like any other subject, cannot evade logic. More than that, the beginning of philosophy coincides with a parallel awareness of the great significance of logic. There has been a renewed awareness of the importance of logic in the modern stage of philosophy's development. Logic is more connected to philosophy than to other sorts of human knowledge, including political knowledge.

Supposing that some Western philosophers have started to neglect the methods of logical accuracy in their problematics and argumentation, as is the case with some modern French writings that are dominated by imagination rather

than systematisation, we should not, as Arabs, emulate this negligence regarding accuracy. What is taken for granted about the Western view is that it is steeped in logical methods. When they abandoned some of them, they ascribed this abandoning to the existence of harbingers of new logical elements. In contrast, the foundation of our contemporary thinkers' position is not steeped in logical methods. When they have to abandon some logical methods, they are unable to establish a new logic. Arguably, those who cannot formulate their arguments in line with a recognised logic, which the majority of philosophers follow, would remain equally unable to formulate them in the new logic they would invent, and they would definitely end up in intellectual chaos that would harm their readers, exacerbate their loss, and reduce their reasoning capability.

The second cause is related to the fact that Arab thinkers do not have sufficient knowledge of logic. They usually focus their attention on the intellectual content of the concepts of modernity and its condition without attending to the logical principles on which they were built or the methodological means used to convey these concepts. They only copy these conditions and concepts from their Western peers, unaware of how to formulate similar modern concepts. They fail to control these conditions in a way that empowers their productivity. They cannot, subsequently, put these concepts and conditions in one inclusive system capable of generation. This is principally due to their lack of logical training. Even those who have written textbooks on logic have developed no method to employ them in constructing logic-based thought. In the best cases, they emulate the findings that Western thinkers have reached in their specific approach to logic. Examples of these findings are their denial of metaphysical issues or their arguments for the ambiguity of philosophical language (with a view to the situation of logic).

This kind of logical looseness in the writing of Arab thinkers is responsible for giving their readers the idea that philosophical writing is not different from literary composition or journalistic writing. As a consequence, readers are inclined to read philosophical essays in the same way they read the morning newspaper or the evening news stories. That is, they do not pay any attention or exert any mental effort. This harms the discretionary ability of the Arab people because the mind that does not exert itself diligently cannot carefully judge anything.

Philosophical thought in the Arab world suffers from two problems. The first concerns the lack of innovation while the second concerns the lack of contemplation in the philosopher's work. In your project *Fiqh al-falsafa* (Understanding Philosophy) you have called for philosophical innova-

tion. What are the requirements of this innovation? How do you approach the problematics of everyday life in the philosophical endeavour?

This is a worthy question because it reflects the intellectual concerns I have had for many years. The answer to the question that you raised is: “The lack of philosophical innovation” and the “absence of concern with everyday life or worldly matters” are basically the same problem since concerns with everyday life are a requisite precondition for philosophical innovation. I have been pre-occupied with this second issue for a long time: How can the Arab philosopher become an innovator? To be an innovator, I think he should be more connected to what I call “his discursive context”. By this I mean his everyday-life context with all its constituents and determinants, values, knowledge, problems, worries, horizons, and related aspects of reality. I see the word “discursivity” as essentially referring to the practical, not theoretical, conditions and factors that predetermine this everyday life. These factors are group-related and not individual-centred; they are variable rather than stable.

My aim in my different works is basically to attain philosophical innovation by way of connecting with everyday discursivity. I have scrutinised Arabic philosophical texts and found many flaws and shortcomings, which made me return to the philosophical texts in their original languages to see how the philosopher put forward his concepts, formulated his judgments, and built his theory. That is, I observed him in his quotidian laboratory creating his personal philosophy. I had to assume the position of a scientist when dealing with the philosopher. I observed him from outside. For this reason, I called my book *Understanding Philosophy*; that is to say, looking at philosophy as a rhetorical phenomenon that the philosopher practises, using its various methods and contents. I could have titled the book “The Philosophical Technique”.

The first step in this project was to assess philosophical translation. I have observed the philosopher’s practice of translation from one language into another. I have also looked into the methods used by the Arabs and have concluded that we have to achieve innovative translation in order to help the Arab audience acquire the ability to philosophise, which entails making philosophy accessible to them. That is, we must bring it closer to their everyday life so that they will be able to understand the content of philosophy the same way they understand matters related to their life. Only then will we see the impact of philosophy on their everyday behaviour.

I am certain that we should not content ourselves with only one way of translating philosophical texts. We must establish several methods of translating texts, taking into account the different stages of the receiver’s acquisition of philosophical competence. The first range of these methods should bring the

receiver closer to the basic meanings of the original text. That is, these basic meanings should be matched with the meanings existing in the everyday life of the receiver. They should sound familiar to him so that he comes to consider them as parts of what normally constitutes his knowledge.

If all these connections take place, they would be able to interact with the receiver's concepts. That is to say, the borrowed meaning would become an active agent in the received text. I have called this first stage "the foundational translation" whose aim is to familiarise the receiver with the original text. Then, we move to the stage I refer to as "the communicative (connective) translation" whereby we translate the contents of the original philosophical text in their entirety including those that do not seem to be connected to the everyday life of the receiver. The latter acquires, through the first translation, the basics that pave the way for accepting the contents that have no direct connection with the everyday discursive field. That is, he would accept it through an intermediary content. When this Arab receiver is ready to accept the original contents, including those that are unfamiliar, it will be possible to move to the third stage I call the "ultimate translation" whereby all the words of the original texts are translated, one by one, until the receiver becomes conscious of the specificity of the original language and will accept it through the aforementioned intermediary content.

As is the case with any new views, my opinion regarding philosophical translation has elicited various reactions. In fact, I have made philosophical translation a particular goal without which this translation will remain a mess, and my intention has been to enable the Arab receiver to philosophise in the translated text. For this reason, I advocate following a special pedagogical method to equip the Arab receiver with this faculty of philosophising.

This method consists of not exposing the receiver to the entire original text all at once. We must gradually introduce this text until the receiver can engage with its contents in their entirety. We begin by translating what he is interested in and comfortable with. Then we can proceed to translate what he is cognitively less familiar with. The philosopher becomes progressively more able to engage with the original text and make use of it in accordance with his goals. The philosophy that we received in the past was mediated by memorisation. The philosophy that I am calling for today aims to change the mind, and this cannot be done all at once. The mind has to be trained to engage in philosophy. This cognitive philosophical training takes considerable time. Moreover, the philosophy that I envision should train the mind to philosophise gradually.

More than other conceptions, this conception of philosophical practice deserves the label "modernity". In Arabic, modernity initially means creation, and creation literally means to do something. Later, modernity comes to indic-

ate re-creation, which literally means to seek in yourself what is modern. Anyone who claims modernity and has no new thought that comes from himself, or no manifestation of his thought in his behaviour, is not worthy of making this claim. He is, on the contrary, an imitator.

The truth of modernity is that it creates the new and modern; that is, the act of innovation. Philosophical modernity is philosophical behaviour that leads a person to innovative philosophical action. I have reiterated in my books that modernity is not about imitating others in their words and actions. Rather, it is about coming up with what can compete with others' production and innovation. I have striven in my various books to be a modernist in this sense and have worked diligently to uncover the mechanisms of innovative action. My entire project revolves around this goal: "enabling the Arabs to philosophise".

Your aim behind raising this communicative dimension of philosophical innovation is to effect a sort of interaction with the Arab audience. However, you write in a language that readers and researchers in this field are not familiar with. How do you justify this undertaking?

This question is no less pertinent than the previous one. I can respond to it in different ways and will mention just a few. First, I see "the level of philosophical innovation" and "the level of theorising for this innovation" as different levels. To elaborate on this, I would say that considering something is not the same as producing something. Thus, the language that I have used to advance my theory of philosophical innovation is quite accurate with regard to the content and terminological techniques. However, the language I have used in formulating an innovative philosophy lacks this accuracy, rather, it is accessible and familiar—even though philosophy is generally known for its particular language. In my writings, I do not labour to formulate a specialised philosophy as much as I labour to explain to the Arabs seeking to become authentic philosophers the way this philosophy can be formulated. Therefore, my language is closer to scientific language than to philosophical language.

The second response to your question is that there is nothing more abhorrent than words and expressions that have become trite, vulgar language that has no quality, especially that which is mere imitation of others and not innovation initiated by the Arab nation. Hence, I do not hesitate to employ terms and constructions that bring about astonishment; I do not resort to language that is strange to our ears and expectations. I tend to emulate the practice of writers and philosophers in their love of genuine words. Perhaps this is owing to my early experience with poetic innovation, when I was smitten by the words the lover speaks to his beloved. Perhaps, it is also owing to my later obsession with

contemplating the wonder of language. If not for language, there would be no human beings. Still another reason may be the association of my earlier literary endeavours with my later philosophical concerns.

The third answer to your question is that I have found the philosophical language used in modern Arabic books very poor and suffering from arbitrary translation; there are no philosophical efforts to come up with Arabic equivalents. But the selection of Arabic equivalents should be philosophy-based; otherwise, they will be useless. These arbitrary translations have paralyzed the internal logic of Arabic philosophical language and interrupted its autonomous dynamicity. Thus, I took it upon myself to expand this language, free its internal logic, and bring about the rebirth of its autonomous dynamicity.

Therefore, you see me employing the semantic and derivational potential of the Arabic language. In my employment of this potential, I have avoided drawing on the modes of foreign languages, which is what most Arab philosophers do. I have also attempted to sort out argumentative and expressive forms from tradition and have become convinced that these forms are incomparable to any forms in our modern language, with particular regard to logical practicability and expression of philosophical meanings. They do that by strictly adhering to the requirements of knowledge specific to our continuously renewed era and in fulfilment of the requirement of rhetoric specific to our Arabic language. My language can be understood only when one stops drawing on the mediatory assistance of foreign languages and instead immerses oneself in Arabic roots.

Is not this a kind of intertextuality with Heidegger when he urged for a return to the language of philosophy, Greek, in order to understand the meaning of philosophical action?

As you know, I have been interested in philosophy for more than three decades. Anyone working in the field of philosophy must consider philosophical thought in all its diverse aspects if intending to produce something rather than imitate others. Moreover, Heidegger's philosophical opinion on the matter you have mentioned is not esoteric or extraordinary. All philosophers return to the linguistic roots of their terminology and employ them in constructing their ideas, whether they state that or not. This is because the speech of philosophers has a long history which consists of layers of interconnected meanings. In principle, the philosopher wishes to return to these layers one by one. He looks at language the way we look at a living organism. That is, it is an organism that bears a history, or if you wish a living memory.

Therefore, we find that most philosophers tend to return to the middle layers of this semantic history. Others return to the layer which immediately precedes

the layer they are studying. While others attempt to return to the earliest initial layer possible. This is what Heidegger in fact did when he returned to the oldest Greek texts to derive inspiration from their philosophical effluences and impulses—as if he intended by this to revive in his thoughts his past, present, and future all in one action. Consequently, he plunged deeper into the past in order to penetrate further into future horizons.

I assert that there is no philosopher who has particularly influenced my thought to the extent that I express my adherence to his philosophy and denote him as my favourite philosopher. Though I have been impressed by this or that great philosopher owing to his tremendous intellect and vast understanding. My acquaintance with philosophy is comparable to that of someone who wants to know all the secrets of the philosophical field that these philosophers do not reveal to others. On other occasions, my acquaintance is analogous to that of someone looking forward to catching up with these philosophers while they are immersed in their philosophical work. I think this is what anyone does who seeks to set an understanding of philosophy in the sense I have identified.

The fourth answer to your previous question concerning my unfamiliar use of language for the reader, is that I follow in my philosophical writing a special method called “inferential writing”. My writings do not follow the narrative, historical, or reporting style. Rather, it is “systemic writing” which was and is still used in constructivist or synthetic philosophical practice. We cannot, for example, read a Kantian text without discerning the inferential structure of his work. Nor can we read modern Anglo-Saxon writings generally without identifying this inferential method I follow. Illustrations of this kind of writing can be found in the works of pioneer Muslim scholars of jurisprudence such as al-Ghazālī in his book *al-Mustasfā min ‘ilm al-uṣūl* (*On Legal Theory of Muslim Jurisprudence*).

What are the components of this inferential writing you have referred to?

In this type of writing it is imperative that the author not start the process of writing until he becomes acquainted with all the issues related to the subject matter he wants to tackle. In so doing, the fundamental topic, which should precede the details, becomes clear to him. Then he engages in constructing his book the way an engineer constructs his building. His work is akin to a solid structure whose parts are strongly interlinked. Therefore, it is not beneficial to read this work by scanning middle or random sections or skipping paragraphs. It should instead be read from the beginning to the end; it should be dealt with step by step until one becomes aware of the way some parts reproduce others.

One must carefully consider the evidence the philosopher has used to prove points in connection with his thesis statement. Most of my books, and even my shortest essays, are written following the inferential method as if each one is an independent system. I start writing only once I have completely understood my subject. Then follows my own logical presentation of it to my readers in accordance with scientific requirements.

However, I keep to myself how I discover the truth of my subjects such as the details of how I am guided to a certain truth at a certain time, in a given circumstance, in a certain manner, or for a certain reason. And then they pass from my memory after a time. What matters most in the building of science is not the stage of discovery, which is most often related to history; it is the stage of inference that is of paramount importance. Nonetheless, in the case of modern Arabic philosophical writing, there is generally a tendency to follow the method of discovery. The philosopher engages in the historicising of ideas, instead of building them. The inferential method is more strenuous than discovery because it is the outcome of a second endeavour in addition to the first one. It is more demanding for the mind because it necessitates a second understanding as well.

I feel sometimes that a microscopic tendency that is represented in a strictly logical language, and that is obsessed with investigation and theorising, would deter a lot of unspecialised intellectuals from understanding the significant characteristics and goals of your project ... I am worried that it would be accessible only to academic elites.

Some people might think that writing entails both addressing the audience and getting involved in their concerns. In my opinion, this is not true. The writer can engage in the concerns of the audience without using a discourse that is understood by the public. He might engage with these concerns in an accurate way that only a particular group discerns; the reason for this is that understanding the details of these concerns can only be attained through meticulous methods. This means the writer has two options: Either to create writings that address the audience with no due consideration to the scientific and methodological requirements—but this would pander to the whims and views of the audience, and he would end up abandoning all scientific and methodological considerations; or to create a kind of writing that seeks to construct knowledge and aims at the truth. He would, thereby, conform to the scientific conditions and methodological requirements. Thus, only specialist receivers and a few readers who are up to date on the evolution of knowledge would be capable of understanding it. Proof is provided in scientific writings from different branches of

knowledge. These writings do not address the general audience; however, their findings benefit this audience.

Unfortunately, some writers who can only create audience-oriented writing have deluded themselves and others into thinking that their writings are explicitly scientific and benefit public and specialist audiences alike. The truth of the matter is that when the writer resorts to the use of ubiquitous media to disseminate his ideas and impose his media authority, his writings do not contribute to the development of science and instead cater to the audience in a way that serves their interests.

I do not think that I would have been able to engage in arguing for the integration of tradition if I had limited myself to addressing the general audience. If I had committed myself to that cause, I would not have gone beyond informing the audience of the main results I have achieved. The audience would have received them as controlling reports rather than justified demands. The truth is that the audience has its own discourse, and scientific research has its own discourse. These discourses are in no way equal even if it is possible to transfer some scientific truths to the audience in an approximate discourse devoid of any evidence or method of construction. One can devote a section of the book to such an approximate discourse that cannot fulfil the requirements of scientific discourse. Nonetheless, if the writer can be required to address the audience according to its level or below it, he can also be required to address this audience in a way that raises its level. I chose to elevate my readers rather than lower the level of scientific discourse.

Yes, you talked in your book about diverse rationalities (reasons) rather than one. What are the manifestations of this diversity? Is it possible to talk about demonstrative philosophy?

Indeed, most of my books refer to this diversity of rationalities in two ways. The first is related to scientific data that only arrogant thinkers contest. The second is an essential postulate that is more particular to me. It is the idea that reason is an action rather than an entity. The purpose behind this insistence is essentially to free the Arab mind (reason) from its dependence on the intellectual rationality of others and make it strive to create its own rationality. More than that, if you look a little closer at my books with regard to this issue you will notice that my references to rational diversity become more striking as we move from one book to another.

For instance, in my book *Fī uṣūl al-ḥiwār wa-tajdīd ʿilm al-kalām* (*On the Fundamentals of Dialogue and Renovation of Islamic Theology*), I have focused on the existence of at least two types of reason. The first one is “demonstrat-

ive reason" (*burhānī*) which governs the scientific practice inside laboratories, factories, observatories, and academic institutions. It controls scientific discourse generally and has no immediate impact on everyday life. The other is "argumentative reason" (*ḥijābī*) which governs the daily transactional relationship between people and controls natural discourse in general. On the basis of this division, I can answer your question about the possibility of talking about demonstrative philosophy. If by the latter we mean a philosophy that is based on groups of evidence that meet the same logical requirements found in the exact sciences, I will say this philosophy is inexistent although a number of philosophers such as Aristotle, Averroes, Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz insisted on its existence. One reason for this is the fact that philosophical language is never too scientific to the extent of making us think it uses difficult demonstrative evidence. Rather, it is a natural language and there is no doubt that natural language uses only simple evidence of an argumentative nature.

Therefore, philosophy should be a straight argumentative discourse, rather than a demonstrative discourse as those philosophers and their imitators claimed. Anyone who is acquainted with the secrets of evidence can verify effortlessly the technical considerations through which philosophical evidence is made purely argumentative. There is nothing wrong or humiliating about a philosophy that has this argumentative-rational nature. On the contrary, it makes the content of philosophy richer, more penetrating, and interactive with everyday matters. Philosophy can also derive from it the principles of renewing and innovation.

Concerning my book *al-ʿAmal al-dīnī wa-tajdīd al-ʿaql* (*Religious Practice and the Renewal of Reason*), I have distinguished between three types of rationalities.

Firstly, "abstracted reason or rationality" (*al-ʿaqlāniyya al-mujarrada*) still bears traces of intensity of sensation. This firmly contradicts the dominant view among laymen and especially philosophers who claim that abstracted reason is devoid of sensation. Indeed, "abstracted reason" only disposed of the content of sensation, whereas the images and forms that accompany these contents of sensation stay intact. That is, this reason appears as a group of structures that have cognitive roots. Within this reason, we find the whole demonstrative reason and part of the argumentative reason.

Secondly, "guided reason or rationality" (*al-ʿaqlāniyya al-musaddada*) is regenerated through its involvement with scientific practice; it especially attains certainty in the goals it seeks to achieve, and the remaining part of "the argumentative reason" belongs to it.

Thirdly, "enhanced or supported reason" (*al-ʿaqlāniyya al-muʿayyada*) results from further involvement in actual practice; it especially attains certainty

not only in the advantages of the targeted goals but also in the success of the means that are used to achieve these goals. With this we can include also “the denotative reason” (*al-‘aqlāniyya al-ishāriyya*).

As for my book *Language and Balance*, I went further in arguing for the multiplicity of reasons. I have coined a new term to address this new sense, which is *al-takāthur al-‘aqlī* (multiplication of reason). It has become clear to me, with no possibility for doubt, that rational actions remain the most fluctuating and transformative actions within the sphere of cognitive actions. They fluctuate not only in line with the various stages of human history; what was rational in the previous eras can be irrational in later eras. Furthermore, it can even fluctuate in different stages with regard to a single individual; for what used to be rational in a certain stage may be irrational in another stage and vice versa. It does not stop at temporal changes. It touches also on spatial changes, for a rational thing may exist in a certain intellectual domain, or logical system, and may not in other domains or systems; it may also be rational in one aspect but not in another and vice versa. I am certain that there are too many types of reasons to count. Counting them is akin to counting all human actions in all their times and places. To argue for the existence of only one type of reason is analogous to compounding all human actions into one action, which is certainly the most myopic view.

Logics

No right and rational knowledge is possible without a prior controlling logic.



The name of Professor Taha Abderrahmane is associated with logic and its philosophy. Will you tell us about the motives for this association and your choice of this philosophical research area?

The association of my name with logic and my choice of its methodologies and philosophy can be ascribed to two motives:

The first is related to my teaching experience in the subject of logic at the Faculty of Humanities in Rabat. Since I joined the faculty in 1970, I was assigned to teach this subject, which the late Najīb Baladi taught previously. I took it upon myself to improve the teaching of this subject. The improvement took different forms. I substituted modern logic for ancient logic, which is a kind of symbolic arithmetical language based on mathematical methodologies. Its accuracy and abstraction are greater than those found in mathematics itself. In addition, it integrates the most accurate elements in the Aristotelian law of logic in the chapter on “predicative propositions” (the logic of perceptions or the logic of concepts) and the most correct element in the law of stoic logic in the chapter on “the logic of judgement or assent (*taṣḍīq*)” or “the logic of propositions”.

Later, I undertook the Arabising of several terms and concepts belonging to this mathematical logic, either by directly quoting them from the Arab-Islamic tradition or by inspiration from the tradition to Arabise them. My Arabic equivalents sound familiar to the Arabic speaker despite their novelty and the recency of their content. They roll off his tongue and are close to his understanding. Third, I have worked hard to increase the teaching hours and scope of the subject of logic. The teaching of this material deals with three areas: the method of logic, the history of logic, and the philosophy of logic. Moreover, it is no longer limited to the philosophy major and has begun to be taught for the Arabic language and literature major.

The second motive for the association of my name with logic is related to my academic interests, research, and writings in logic. The topic of my doctoral dissertation was the use of the tools of modern logic in studying the phenomena of language. I have also written two books: *Formal Logic and Grammar*, which tackles the relationship between logic and linguistics; and *On the Fundamentals of Dialogue and Renovation of Theology* in which I advanced a symbolic logical formulation for the method of debate among Muslims, in addition to various essays, one of which is on al-Ghazālī's notion of causality from the perspective of the possible worlds theory (*al-Munāẓara*, *Debate Journal*, N 1–2.). In this essay, I refuted the common claims related to al-Ghazālī's concept of causality (*sababiyya*), using an extensive logical analysis of this problem. It was an unprecedented analysis.

Professor Taha works vigorously in the field of terminology and concepts. Why is that? Is it related to your background in logic or linguistics?

It is true that the status of terminology in modern Arab-Islamic production matters a great deal to me. To clarify the motive for this interest, I will start by distinguishing between two stages in the practice of terminology. The stage of consuming foreign terminology and the stage of producing original terminology. Modern Arab production remains fixed at the stage of consuming foreign terminology. The followers of this camp grasp the borrowed terminology which appears in different translations with varying scientific values. At the level of producing the original terminology, I am not sure they have grasped its requirements. By this terminology, I mean the researcher comes up with the terminology, and then he completely defines its procedural characteristics. Thus, for the researcher, this terminology has either a descriptive, analytical, or interpretive value. And it is true that he cannot reach this stage if he does not acquire the ability to "theorise". That is, he has to acquire the logical skill of building the methods, theories, and models according to his needs.

Hence, I took it upon myself to explore the stage of producing terminology at the logical and philosophical levels. In so doing, I abided by the following criteria:

- a. To draw on the most recent theoretical and methodological requirements and parameters used in formulating scientific terminology.
- b. To invest in the expressive and rhetorical possibilities inherent in the Arabic language, which have not yet been investigated in philosophical writings.
- c. To abide by the practical guidelines in the Arab-Islamic tradition that have contributed to maintaining its particular specificity.

Perhaps the researcher abiding by these criteria will acquire the ability to produce a distinct and renovative philosophical thought. He does not depend on foreign terminologies. For example, he does not discuss the concepts others have discussed. He builds his own concepts independently from them. If it happens that he discusses a borrowed meaning such as “modernity”, he will not by necessity copy it from the source terminologies. It is possible, therefore, that he will re-create from these terminologies new values and meanings which can guide our departure from backwardness, without drawing on the values and meanings that guided the West toward modernity and are applied in their societies.

The act of chasing foreign terminology impedes its efficiency and productivity within the arena of the host intellectual practice because this terminology carries traces of foreign origin. It remains a part of the cognitive network connected to this origin. The Arab user of this terminology must evoke those traces whenever he wants to work on it. As a result, he will not be able to achieve innovation by way of using this terminology. In addition, the Arabic equivalent may enter into other cognitive and conceptual relationships that are not connected to the cognitive constituents of foreign terminology. Subsequently, the Arab user of this terminology finds himself obliged to seek guidance in the source/foreign terminology. This kind of recourse will be repeated whenever there appear new aspects of this terminology’s productivity in its source context.

In the history of Islamic intellectual practice, logic was compared by some scholars to heresy, “zandaqa”. What do you think about this judgment?

In reality, logic was treated unfairly in the past. I assure you that some scholars still perpetuate this unfairness. The best proof is that the teaching of logic is banned in some Arab-Islamic universities. For some people, the saying “those who use logic engage in heresy” has become a catchphrase. This may justify their common association of old logic with the name philosophy. That is to say, “those who are concerned with philosophy may be involved with heresy.” Apparently, scholarly interest in philosophy has been often seen as a source of suspicion and disagreement. Additionally, some ancient logicians sidestepped the parameters of the Arab-Islamic discursive field. This refers to the set of principles and general rules which govern belief, language, and knowledge, and which constitute the belief system of all those who belong to Arab-Islamic society.

At the level of belief, some philosophers attempted, under the excuse of using demonstrative logic (reason), to argue for ideas that go against Sharia

such as “eternity of the world”, and “God’s ignorance of particulars” (God Almighty is above their description). At the level of language, some of them chose ways of expression that are not familiar to the Arabs’ habits of clarification and brevity. At the level of knowledge, some of them spoke of matters that are not supported by evidence, do not have any benefits, and are not based on the principles of Islamic law.

Indeed, those attitudes—that either stand against logic or misuse it (which subsequently sidestep the Arab-Islamic discursive requirements)—suggest the incapability of those who have those attitudes to understand the nature of the science of logic and its methods. This science is no more than a “set of artificial methods that are useful in classification, synthesising, and theorising”. It has basically nothing to do with (un)truthfulness of belief. Some Muslim scholars like al-Ghazālī were aware of this fact. Logic is itself innocent of heresy. It becomes heresy when it is employed for a certain agenda, or exploited in a way that is opposed to Sharia. No one can deny that logic provides us with incomparable tools—in terms of accuracy, exactitude, and depth—for analysis and synthesis. Added to this, we can refer to another fact related to the necessity of using logic in describing the aims of Sharia. That is, given the instrumentality (*adātiyya*) of logic, its use in reading the contents of scripture enables us to attend to details that are not reachable through other means, as long as the researcher is guided by the light of Islamic law. We can, therefore, state that “all that is subjected to the law of Islam and logic is realisable.”

You are considered the father of logic in Morocco. My question is this, how can we now employ logic for educational and intellectual purposes? Why do not we teach logic to secondary school students? Normally we are supposedly obliged to teach students logic and reasoning at an early age.

I am grateful for your positive attitude toward logic; nevertheless, the dominant perception of logic is negative, if not downright hostile, owing to the following erroneous arguments:

The first argument I denote “the argument of the volitional (*ikhtiyyāriyyāt*) logic”. This means that the person has the choice to practise logic. However, logic is not an option. It is rather an obligation for anyone who has a mind (reason) since this does not work in the absence of logic. Those who think otherwise are either without a mind or do not grasp what it really means to possess a mind.

I call the second argument “the particularity (*juz’iyyāt*) of logic”. This means that logic is limited only to a certain area of knowledge. It has a limited scope as it is used in the field of science and philosophy but is not allowed in jur-

isprudence and politics. This is an incorrect view because there is no area of knowledge in which the mind (reason) operates without its necessary, guiding logic.

I call the third argument “the luxuries (*kamāliyyāt*) of logic”. It claims that logic is a mere luxury and adornment to improve our speeches and writings. Thus, there is no harm or embarrassment if we do not use it. This is again debatable; since the mind (reason) cannot be considered an adornment it is likewise not right to consider logic a mere adornment.

So, what is logic? It simply means that one requires a certain manner to perform what one thinks or wants to express. This manner has its own organising rules that regulate the speaker’s thoughts and expressions. If this manner is not observed, one’s expressions will lack harmony. Thus, learning about this manner, in this case, becomes an individual rather than a collective obligation. It is the guarantee that the mind will work correctly and efficiently. This manner of thinking and expressing is what we specifically call logic. Anyone who praises reason and disparages logic falls into contradiction. It is like saying “I am logical, but I do not have logic”, or saying “I am rational, but I do not have reason.” It has been proven that there must be a practice of logic in all types and levels of thinking, expressing, and behaving from childhood to old age, if not to the end of life.

Some scientific discoveries, especially in physics, have started to refute some of the constants in formal logic. For instance, we find in the latest discovery in atomic physics that one thing can exist simultaneously in two places. This is an obvious infringement of the general principle of contradiction, which is considered one of the laws deemed among the constants of human thought. How do you now evaluate formal logic?

I want to raise attention to the fact that the label “formal logic” is somehow misleading; why? It suggests that logic is stable and does not develop, and the truth is that logic has been through various stages. I want to say here that logic is today witnessing colossal developments that are not at all easily understandable. There have been different types of logical patterns in different fields of knowledge, including literary fields. For instance, the “law of identity,” the “law of non-contradiction,” and the “law of excluded middle or third” were deemed to be unavoidable and final cognitive principles. However, some of these overriding principles of logic were annulled. A case in point is what is known as “inconsistency logic” which is an arithmetical logic that does not observe the law of non-contradiction. That is, we look at its postulates as including two contradictory elements.

Therefore, we cannot say that there are fixed laws that constitute the principles of reason. The thing that remains stable is that when you choose your postulates and their deductive rules, you have to abide by them until the end in the arrangement of results. Subsequently, reason is no more than a kind of abiding by the patterns you have chosen. Reason is, thus, not one entity. It can be understood as a number of reasons, not in the individual or group senses, but in its procedural sense. That is, every pattern constitutes a certain reason. Reasons vary in tandem with the variance of patterns. That is why I have continued reminding the readers of my books that reason, in contradistinction to the common belief among both the elite and common audience, is not an inherent entity in human beings. Rather, it is an action that originates in humans such as the actions of hearing, seeing, and speaking. There is no material or scientific criterion proving the existence of an independent entity called reason. There is only you, the human being I am talking to. From you, there come various perceptual manifestations. This view is supported by the fact that actions develop while entities remain stable. If reason were a stable entity, it would not develop. It can never develop in isolation from hearing and seeing; it must then be an action. It represents the actional nature.

Can you elaborate on Ibn Taymiyya's critique of Aristotelian logic?

Ibn Taymiyya was not a normal logician. He was an innovative logician who argued against many of the fundamentals attributed to the logic of Aristotle. He worked diligently and reasoned carefully to come up with a new logic that is closer to the discursive field of everyday routine than to abstract philosophical language. I am saddened that neither his supporters nor his non-fundamentalist opponents made use of the logical thinking of Ibn Taymiyya. For Ibn Taymiyya produced new views in logic worth considering and analyzing. His contribution to logic was more innovative than that of the logicians who preceded him including prominent philosophers such as al-Farābī and Avicenna because all these philosophers remained imprisoned by Aristotle's fundamentals. If there was anything new in their thought, it was strictly connected to these Aristotelian fundamentals.

By contrast, Ibn Taymiyya tried to advance the fundamentals of new logic to replace those used by Aristotle. For instance, he opposed the idea that analogy (*qiyās*) consists of three terms and three propositions, and he considered necessity the main relationship that determines the subject of logic. Other Salafists did not employ such matters to advance a theory in Islamic logic because they did not grasp much of his logic. They contented themselves with regurgitating his speeches. Besides, they were not equipped with a modern repertoire of logic

that could allow them to understand fully Ibn Taymiyya's immense contribution to this field. Similarly, the non-Salafists did not have sufficient training in logic. Their dogmatic attitudes against Ibn Taymiyya impeded their investment in his logic. In fact, his logic was practical, alive, and empirical, unlike the fixed and formal logic that Aristotle produced.

In your dealing with logical, linguistic, and philosophical questions, we noticed the presence of some means or methods belonging to jurisprudence, can you explain the reasons behind the use of these means?

Your question is apt. Yes, this jurisprudence methodology is indeed present in my work, owing to several factors:

Firstly, I consider this methodology the Islamic logical contribution that is not Aristotelian and is evident generally in the Arab-Islamic tradition. In this vein, I claimed in *Language and Balance* that jurisprudence is part of logic, in opposition to al-Ghazālī's argument that logic is part of jurisprudence.

Secondly, this methodology has contributed to the study of the phenomenon of discourse in an impressive way. It comprises scientific means whose procedural benefits are still relevant.

Thirdly, this methodology has an encyclopedic nature in that it forms a space where multiple sciences intersect. It was absolutely the most common Islamic methodology.

Fourthly, I have intended in my various research endeavours to renew and continue the Islamic intellectual contribution, which entails a connection with past intellectual work without causing it to stagnate. I have found jurisprudence the best approach, among the various facets of Islamic methodology, to fulfil this task owing to its openness, innovation, and integration.

Sufisms

He who is seeking philosophical perfection should look forward
to the horizon of spiritual beauty



Your publication: *Religious Practice and the Renewal of Reason*, represents an attempt to write your autobiography in relation to Sufism; what was your spiritual experience? Was it similar to al-Ghazālī's experience?

It is true that my book *Religious Practice and the Renewal of Reason* is directly related to my experience with Sufism; however, it is not an autobiography as it seems to be from the first glimpse. I did not mention anything about my life, except for six pages at the beginning of the first edition which was published about ten years ago. It is indeed the fruit of the knowledge I have reaped from this experience. The proof that it is not an autobiography is the deductive construction I have followed in this book. I even consider it my strongest book in terms of its complying with the requirements of logical structuring. This was not a matter of a passing coincidence, but it was intentionally in coherence with the purpose of this book, which the title suggests. The book had, in fact, many purposes.

My primary purpose was to elucidate how the spiritual experience, in contrast with what was inculcated in the human mind for many ages, is never incongruent with mental knowledge. Instead, it can be a contributory factor for the enhancement and penetration of this knowledge.

How can spiritual experience enhance mental knowledge? How is that possible knowing that we inherently live the spiritual experience, whereas mental knowledge is acquired through thinking and theoretical examination of external matters?

In fact, spiritual experience does not provide you with the objective characteristics of things, procedural methods, specific rules, or fixed laws that the practice of theoretical reason allows before involvement in this experience.

However, it provides you with something that is not less valuable or influential than the benefits allowed by the experience of theoretical examination. It provides you with a set of values, purposes, and meanings derived from the actual practice. When you are equipped with these spiritual values, you will see different prospects for exploiting, orienting, restructuring, and arranging these characteristics, methods, rules, and objective laws that are allowed through theoretical examination. These prospects are not possible in the absence of these values. Human minds differ in accordance with their difference in the prospects of the investment potential of things. Thus, the depth and breadth of your mind depend on your acquisition of these values; that is, the extent of your penetration into the spiritual experience.

For this reason, I disagree completely with Averroes, and Ibn Bājā before him, who thought that the Sufi experience, being practical, does not benefit theoretical knowledge in any way. This is due to his Aristotelian insistence on separating theory and practice. I believe that this is absolutely wrong because practice, in all its different forms, constantly influences theoretical examination, which constantly expands its means and refines its structures, thanks to this practical effect. Indeed, this effect increases in parallel with progress in the levels of practice; it increases also whenever the practice becomes more transparent and sophisticated. For instance, nobody can deny that sensory activity influences mental examination, and sensory activity does not have only one level. The effect on mental examination increases as the progress of these sensory levels increases. One can then imagine the effects of spiritual activity, which is undoubtedly more refined and transparent than sensory activity, and has a great and far-reaching effect on mental examination. And since spiritual activity has also endless levels, when compared with its sensory counterpart, the effect will achieve its greatest strength.

Assuming that the lowest level of spiritual activity has more influence on mental examination than the highest level of sensory activity—let alone the effect of the highest level of spiritual activity (its influence is so remarkable and incomparable)—it turns out therefore that spiritual experience has a weighty influence on mental knowledge. This influence is much greater than that exerted by sensory experience. It enriches the capabilities of mental knowledge, enhances its levels, and extends its limits.

This is my first aim for the book I mentioned. As for my second aim, I wanted to show how the cognitive faculties of human beings are interconnected despite their difference. There is no such thing as a purely sensory, mental, or spiritual faculty. Instead, some aspects of the mind exist in the sensory faculty, as there exist some aspects of the spirit in the mental faculties and vice versa. That is to say, there is some trace of the mind in the spiritual faculty, which par-

allels the traces of sensation that exist in the mental faculty. If the premise of the connection between these different cognitive and mental faculties is justified, it is right then to posit that spiritual experience is complementary to mental examination; it is not disconnected from it or even disruptive of it as some people have wrongly claimed.

As for the third aim, I wanted to demonstrate that the mind has various and differing levels. The lowest level of the mind parallels the lowest level of the sensory faculty because the mind is believed to preserve some of its density and roughness. The highest level of the mind is closer to the highest level of the spiritual faculty because the mind has already been exposed to and affected by the beginnings of spiritual subtlety to a greater or lesser degree.

As for whether I have lived the Sufi experience the same way al-Ghazālī did, I would say that we agree only on embarking on the experience. I did not start this journey as a doubter or fugitive as al-Ghazālī did. He escaped to Sufism involuntarily, while I came to it willingly. He was running away from two forces; the first is the force of power and renown that was compelling him to involve himself in intrigues, conspiracies, and conflicts for authority. The second one was the force of philosophical uncertainty that overwhelmed him because of his long engagement with philosophy. By contrast, my involvement with Sufism was motivated by two entirely different reasons. The first is related to my desire to strengthen my love and bond with God rather than escape from other forces. It was an overwhelming pleasure that kept me away from all other seductions. The second reason was that I wanted to verify the nature of meaning that is beyond the stage of philosophical reason: is it irrational entirely? Or, is it rational somehow? My long involvement with philosophy—even my concern with logic, which is based more on deduction or problematisation—did not lead me to doubt at all the truth of fideism. This corroborates what someone says “Too much philosophy begets certainty, and too little philosophy begets scepticism.” This stands in contrast to the philosophy of Cartesian doubt which misled many generations for a long time.

My concern with philosophy did not change my opinion about the role of spiritual experience in attaining more knowledge regarding the truth of fideism as happened to Averroes, who was attending to stories of Sufis, such as Ibn ‘Arabī, and he was even spying on them as he did with Abī ‘Abbās al-Sabtī. In my opinion, this kind of intellectual eavesdropping is evidence of his shaken faith in Aristotelian absolute knowledge; he was seeking the possible existence of another knowledge besides Aristotelianism.

It is quite clear that you have emphasised the value of deduction (*istidlāl*), what is your stance toward intuitive (*ḥadsīyya*) knowledge?

It is true that many philosophers distinguish between deduction and intuition to the extent of dichotomising them; however, I think that this dichotomy is replete with pretensions. They are both—as the same philosophers agree—mental perceptions that are only different in the fact that the first is a direct perception, while the other is indirect. Therefore, it could be said that the difference between intuition, direct mental perception, deduction, and indirect mental perception is only relative. To justify this, I can only mention that the same thing can be an intuition for some people but a deduction for others. What is considered obvious and elementarily intuitive in a given logical order can be rationally verified in another order.

So, you do not agree with Bergson's argument that there is a metaphysical intuition, which we call in our Islamic tradition the Sufi through inspiration (*ilhām*) or illumination (*ishrāq*)?

It seems, according to what you have said, that there are two types of intuition: mental intuition which can be attributed to deduction, and metaphysical intuition, that is, perceptivity, which cannot be subjected to deduction. But if we assume that metaphysical intuition is of a mental nature, it can then be subjected to a special deductive act which I would call encapsulated deduction (*al-istidlāl al-maṭwī*). That is, there are some deductions in which there features only a part of the introduction or none at all, as they depend on the receiver to work them out from the context.

Similarly, intuition is a sort of deduction with encapsulated introductions because the agent of intuition has sufficient practice and deep familiarity with the topic of intuition to the extent that what he perceives intuitively, without any intermediaries, cannot be accomplished by others without intermediaries or deduction. It is through interaction with things that human beings come to feel their existence. Such an interaction can transform deduction regarding things into intuition. If I may compare this encapsulated intuition with something organic, I would say that intuitions envelop deductions in the same way that genes envelop human life. This is similar to the saying "The sign is beyond the words." That is, the interaction with the content of the words becomes so frequent and dominant to the extent that one needs only a sign to obtain the whole meaning.

In this way, both intuition and deduction assume the positions of two languages or faces of the same truth. I totally disagree here with Descartes and Bergson and other intuitionists. If someone asks me what is intuition (*hids*), I would say "intuition is an encapsulated deduction". If they ask me what is sensitivity (*dawq*), I would say "sensitivity is an encapsulated reason"; if by contrast,

they ask me what is deduction, I would say “deduction is a refracted intuition (*ḥids manshūr*)”, and if they ask me what is reason I would say “reason has a prism (*al-‘aql dhū manshūr*).”

From your own Sufi and philosophical experience, how do you express your aesthetic opinion toward art, innovation, public speaking, theatre, and music? Do you have an aesthetic theory in this field?

I think that a person who has no appreciation of the aesthetic value of things is not complete because human beings have two dimensions. The first one is the sublime (*jalālī*) dimension which refers to inherently empowering forces such as knowledge, thought, logic, industry, and so on. The second one is the aesthetic (*jamālī*) dimension which refers to inherent human values, be they literature, painting, theatre, music, or similar values, and which provide humans with refinement. The complete human should combine both dimensions in his private and public life because he is a balanced and normal human. He is as much strong as he is sensitive. His strength emanates from his reason, and his refinement stems from his taste; therefore, education in the sublime dimension for both the young and adults should be accompanied by education in the aesthetic dimension so that balance and normality can be realised.

Every philosopher should have a theory of aesthetics and another of sublimity. My theory of aesthetics has three characteristics that no other philosophers share with me.

Firstly, beauty or aesthetics (*jamāl*) is a beneficial pleasure that enhances human determination toward perfection. The more beauty you attain the more your humanity is elevated. Once you attain this level, you will seek another greater pleasure that would raise you to another level of humanity, and so on and so forth in a kind of dialectics between pleasure and perfection. Each pleasure takes you to perfection and each perfection takes you to pleasure.

Secondly, the aesthetic value, in contrast to the dominant belief among those involved in art and literature, is never at loggerheads with the moral-ethical value. Beauty has many levels; its lowest is near-visible beauty, while its highest is the distant-invisible beauty. There are countless levels between them. Morals and ethics also have levels; the lowest is the restricted visible moral-ethical, while the highest is the free invisible moral-ethical. There are countless levels between them. Once your level is raised in one of these values, you draw nearer to the other value; when you reach the highest level in one of them, you reach the highest level in the other. They are only separated in the lowest levels, whereas on the highest levels, they stay together. What is extremely aesthetic is also extremely moral-ethical and vice versa.

Thirdly, if a nation feels unable to contribute to its civilisation surroundings, using its sublime dimension that revolves around power and strength, it can always contribute to this surrounding through its aesthetic dimension that revolves around sensitivity and kindness. Thus, I argue that our thinkers should consider seriously the adequate aesthetic ways our Arab-Islamic world should contribute to this new century since there seem to be no opportunities for our contribution to the supreme dimension, power, and strength. I am certain that if we are guided in these ways, we will have many aesthetic values to offer to the people of the new millennium, who will need us more than we need their supreme power.

Before I obtained any theory on aesthetics, I completed many studies as well as much creative writing regarding it. I will tell a secret that many of my researchers, students, and followers are unaware of. I took a course in aesthetics and the history of art at the Institute of fine art in Paris while I was a student of philosophy between 1967–1968. I also wrote poetry at an early age, and it was good according to the critics. I willingly stopped during the war of June 1967 between the Arabs and Israel. My last poem was entitled “On My Way to the Poem”. My decision was similar to the Arab poet Imru’ al-Qays when he said, “Let it be enjoyable today and let tomorrow take care of itself”. I stopped writing poetry for good, not out of contempt or rejection but to devote myself to intellectual endeavours. I wanted to learn the workings of the mind that defeated the Arabs, despite the greatness of their history and their immense population. I have achieved my goal, thanks to God; I have learnt more about that mind’s secret than it probably knows itself. Perhaps I will return to the life of poetry after the completion of my intellectual project, as poetry is said to transport the spirit to remote worlds.

Will you tell us about justifications for this possible return to poetry?

I can mention three justifications that have attracted my attention. First, prose is not the basis of the art of speech as is widely assumed, rather, it is poetry. For me, when the first human spoke, he did not speak prose but poetry. To elaborate, the first speech was metaphorical rather than real because truth is a mental construction whereas metaphor is an instinctive given. This latter came before the former. Metaphor is only complete when it resides in poetry. Undoubtedly, the first human used metaphor perfectly. Speech then is poetry in origin, whereas prose is poetry whose metaphorical origin has been stripped off by the mind.

If I return to poetry, I will return first to the practice of speech because it is the human instinct in its perfection. Thus, my aim in returning to poetry will

be to retain and perfect my humanity. Is there anything one would prefer to the perfection of his humanity?

Second, the language of existence is poetic and not prosaic. Our inherent conditions and our surrounding worlds are not lifeless and stagnant, mute and speechless. Instead, they are alive and vocal. It is clear that their life and speaking do not appear in verbal words that are issued by these surrounding things and conditions which our emotions recognise. The truth of poetry is that it is speech that is borne out of perceiving signs, in that signs that poetry conveys are the same signs that our inherent conditions and our surroundings convey. Therefore, poetic speech is inclusive of all parts of existence, conditions, and things.

If I return to poetry, I prefer to return to this connection with the world in its entirety because it represents the perfection of human existence. The aim of my return to poetry would be the perfection of my existence. Is there anything one would aspire to have than this perfection of existence?

Third, it is poetry, and not prose, which transports us beyond abstract reason; prose is a mere trace of this abstract reason. Exploring what is behind the veil of reason must be accomplished through another means than this trace of reason. These means are made possible by poetry, which enables the human being to penetrate the seven strata reach hidden worlds and endless horizons.¹

If I return to poetry, I will want to dive into endless oceans because through this my spirituality will witness a new resurrection. The aim of my return to poetry would be to renew my spirit; is there anything one would rather renew than his spirit?

¹ "Seven strata" is a crude translation of *al-sab' al-ṭibāq* which refers in the Qur'ān to the seven heavens: "He Who created the seven heavens one above another" (Q 67:3).

Dialogues for the Future

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