# Preface

# The Challenges to Islamic Intellectual Thought

The crisis of the Islamic intellectual tradition is its loss of vitality. No longer a dynamic means of engaging with intellectual, scientific, and theoretical issues, it has become a curiosity of history to be admired and then ignored. The intellectual tradition is just as alien to modern Muslim thinkers as the exquisite artifacts of the Islamic past are alien to Muslim homes. Just as the television, gaudy knickknacks, and shoddy architecture dominate Muslim visual space, so also the spirit of the times, technological hype, and political ideology dominate Muslim mental space. Although the Muslim community has an ample share of scholars who would consider themselves both "Muslims" and "intellectuals," seldom are these scholars both at the same time. They are Muslims in their ritual practices, yet they think in terms that would be unrecognizable to any representative of the intellectual traditions of the past. The reason is clear. They have been trained in the modern professional disciplines, and these are based on methodologies that have grown up and developed in the West after centuries of abandoning every principle held sacred by the Islamic tradition (and, I might add, by the pre-modern Christian tradition). The first of these principles is *tawhîd*, the foundation of Islamic thought and practice.

I take it for granted that the Muslim community is faced with an intellectual crisis. The fact that Muslims are largely unaware of it does not lessen the mortal danger that it poses to the survival of Islam as a viable tradition in the twenty-first century. The purpose of this chapter is to address Muslim unawareness by answering three basic questions: What exactly is this "intellectual

tradition?" Why is it in danger of being completely lost? Why should anyone care about losing it?

Although Muslim philosophers and other representatives of the intellectual tradition parallel to it often discussed the issue of time and space, representatives of the transmitted tradition did not continue the discussion. These two words - "intellectual" and "transmitted," `aqlî* and *naqlî* - are typically contrasted. They differentiate two basic kinds of learning. If the difference between the two sorts of learning is not clear, all sorts of misunderstandings arise.

Transmitted learning is characterized by the fact that it needs to be passed on from generation to generation. The only possible way to learn it is to receive it from someone else, or at least from books. In contrast, intellectual learning cannot be passed on, even though teachers are needed to guide seekers of knowledge in the right direction. Only individuals within themselves can find such learning. It is discovered by training the mind or, as some of the texts put it, "polishing the heart." Without retrieving this knowledge from within oneself, one has no intellectual knowledge, only transmitted knowledge.

Typical examples of transmitted sciences are language, Qur'an recitation, and the Hadith. The usual example of an intellectual science is mathematics. We do not say, "two plus two equals four because my teacher said so." The human mind is able to discover and understand mathematical truth on its own, and once the mind discovers this knowledge, it does not depend upon any outside authority. The knowledge is known to be true because, once one understands it, it is self-evident, which is to say that it cannot be denied, any more than one can deny one's own self-awareness. In contrast, we do say, "Muslims must pray five times a day because God said so." The mind cannot discover what God said without the transmission of the Prophetic reports. And, once

we have gained the transmitted learning, we still do not know why God said "five" times and not "three" nor "six." The basic reason is always, "because God said so," not "because it is self-evident." Any sort of explanation is after-the-fact and serves only to enhance the authority of the source of the teachings and to make them easier to accept.

I do not want to make an absolute distinction between intellectual and transmitted learning. The two types of knowledge intermix in the human soul. Moreover, intellectual learning is built upon transmission, which provides the raw material with which the mind is able to reach understanding. None the less, there are many great Muslims of the past who are known much more for their contributions to the intellectual sciences than to the transmitted sciences. All the scholars who are nowadays thought to have been "scientists" in the modern sense belonged primarily to the intellectual tradition. For a few examples, it is enough to look at the names of the pre-modern scholars mentioned in the titles of the papers presented at the conference on "Time, Space, and Motion in Islam" in 2000.

## Methodology

The best way to understand the difference between intellectual and transmitted learning is perhaps in terms of *taqlîd* and *tahqîq*. *Taqlîd* ("imitation" or "following authority") is the proper way to learn transmitted knowledge. *Tahqîq* ("verification" or "realization") is the proper way to acquire intellectual knowledge.

People learn language from others by imitation, and thus they also learn correct Islamic conduct by imitating the Prophet and

his worthy followers.  In contrast, the only possible way to master the intellectual sciences is by verification and realization.  In other words, people cannot know the truth of an intellectual issue without discovering it for themselves in themselves.  Although you can learn a mathematical formula by rote, until you understand it thoroughly, and until it becomes second nature to you, it is not yours.  You are simply imitating others in your knowledge.  The Muslim intellectuals insist that to imitate others in intellectual issues is to be an ignoramus.  However, to imitate the Qur'an and the Prophet in <u>transmitted</u> matters is to follow the right path.

In short, there are two basic kinds of knowledge, and each is acquired by a particular method.  The method used for the transmitted sciences is *taqlîd* or imitation, and that for the intellectual sciences is *tahqîq* or verification and realization.  Someone who becomes a master of the discipline of fiqh or jurisprudence, which is one of the transmitted sciences, may reach the degree of ijtihâd.  However, a *mujtahid* should not be confused with a *muhaqqiq*.  A *mujtahid*'s mastery cannot be acquired without the transmission of the Qur'an and the Hadith.  By contrast, a *muhaqqiq* can, in principle, grasp all the intellectual sciences without Prophetic help.  You do not need a prophet to tell you that two plus two equals four or that God is One.  The knowledge itself is self-evident, which is to say that it carries its own proof within the very act of understanding it.

Given that there are two routes of learning - "imitation" and "verification" -  and given that imitation is suitable for the transmitted sciences and verification for the intellectual sciences, it follows that if you learn an intellectual theory or dictum that you have not verified yourself, you have not employed a proper methodology.  To say that the methodology is incorrect is to say that you do not really know what you think you know, despite the fact that you consider yourself knowledgeable.  Thinking that you know something when you do not know it is called "compound

ignorance" (*jahl murakkab*). In other words, you do not know it, and you do not know that you do not know it.

Compound ignorance is considered a blight on the human soul, because it closes the door to learning and understanding. If you think you already know something, why would you try to find out the truth of the matter? Compound ignorance is an incurable disease. Or rather, the only way to cure it is first to wake up to one's ignorance. If one does wake up, one's ignorance will no longer be compound but "simple" (*basît*). The cure for simple ignorance is to search for knowledge.

In short, even if you remember nothing else about the intellectual tradition, you should remember this. The first goal of intellectual learning is *tahqîq*, that is, to know things by verifying and realizing their truth for yourself. You cannot verify the truth and reality of something without knowing it at firsthand, for yourself, in your own soul, without any help from anyone other than God. If your knowledge is based on the words of the "authorities" or the "experts," it is not verified knowledge. Rather, it is imitative knowledge. It makes no difference if the authorities happen to be traditional prophets, like Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, or modern "prophets," like Darwin and Einstein.

Some would respond that Muslims do not need to know things for themselves, because they can follow "consensus" (*ijmâ`*). However, this is true only of transmitted matters, not intellectual matters. There is no such thing as *ijmâ`* in the Islamic intellectual disciplines. Basic intellectual issues such as *tawhîd* do not depend for their truth-value on consensus. Rather, their truth is self-evident to those who understand them.

One of the sure signs of the loss of the intellectual tradition is the strange phenomenon of Muslim thinkers apologizing for modern science by appealing to the "consensus" of the scientists.

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Even stranger is that they think they have taken an "intellectual" position.  This shows that they have confused transmitted learning with intellectual learning.  Modern science is indeed built on consensus, yet this simply illustrates the fact that it is a transmitted science, not an intellectual science.  Scientists do not verify and realize what they think they know.  Rather, they accept it on the authority of their ulama, an authority built on the reputation of "prophetic" figures like Newton and Einstein.

Muslim intellectuals did not consider transmitted learning to be intellectual knowledge, because its truth depends not on its self-evidence, but on the reliability of the transmitters and the authority of its prophets.  Individual scientists cannot verify it.  Rather, it must be accepted on trust, precisely because it is knowledge by *taqlîd*, imitation or following authority.  For the Muslim intellectuals, the only possible way to verify and realize the truth of something was to know it firsthand, for oneself and in oneself.  Beyond that, we have entered into the arena of belief.  All modern science and learning are built on a vast structure of beliefs.  Although the truth of these beliefs is far from self-evident, they are accepted on the basis of transmission and consensus.

It can be argued that modern scientists who make new discoveries have "verified" them for themselves. Muslim intellectuals would not call this "verification," however, because it does not reach deeply enough into things to recognize their true nature and realize their reality.  Rather, the great scientific breakthroughs are achieved by what can justly be called "flashes of intuition," which pierce the limitations of consensual knowledge.  This is analogous to what the Sufi tradition calls "unveiling" (*kashf*).  Nevertheless, the Sufi teachers always warn of the great dangers of unveiling if it is not understood in light of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.  However this may be, the flashes of insight necessary for scientific breakthroughs and paradigm shifts merely highlight the "prophetic" character of the great scientists.  It does

not detract from the fact that the vast majority of scientists play the role of clerks and mullahs.  The best of them are scientific *mujtahids*, who apply scientific "laws" to new situations. The one thing modern scientists or scholars can never be *muhaqqiqun*— unless they step out of the context of modernity and ally themselves to a living intellectual tradition.

In short, modern scientists - and, with far greater reason, the gullible public - accept scientific discoveries and "facts" on the basis of imitation and consensus.  They trust the scientists' promise that the discovery can be replicated by empirical research.  They are unaware that modern theories are devices employed to interpret data for certain ends, and that the prestige of the theories derives not from their inherent truth, but from their usefulness for achieving the ends and the degree to which they are accepted by the scientists, that is, the degree to which the ulama reach *ijmâ`* concerning the theory.  Moreover, some of the most sacred of the scientific theories, such as evolution, are not based on empirical data in the first place, because they cannot be proven by experimentation.

To speak of scientific learning as if it is the same sort of knowledge as that pursued by the Muslim intellectuals is to misunderstand the methods and goals of both the Muslim "scientists" and modern scientists and scholars.  Modern knowledge is transmitted and consensual, just like the knowledge pursued by the jurists and grammarians in Islam.  In contrast, the knowledge pursued by Ibn Sînâ and other great Muslim scientists was "intellectual" in the proper sense of the word.  In other words, each individual who undertook the quest was trying to verify and realize knowledge for himself, not to imitate the opinions of others.

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# Intellectual Tradition

Having alluded to the methodology of Islamic intellectual learning, let me say something about the content of this learning.[1] What sort of knowledge can properly be verified? What were Muslim intellectuals trying to know by themselves and for themselves, without following the authority of the prophets and the experts?

Note first that the purpose of the intellectual quest was not to gather information or what we call "facts." Nor was it contribute to the "progress of science," much less to build up a "database." Rather, its purpose was to refine human understanding. In other words, seekers of this knowledge were trying to train their minds and polish their hearts so that they could understand everything that can properly be understood by the human mind, everything about which it is possible to have certain, sure, and verified knowledge. All seekers of knowledge were expected to realize their knowledge for themselves. They were expected to know their subject with firsthand, unmediated knowledge. If they took the word of a teacher or a book instead of realizing the truth

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[1] Those familiar with the traditions of Islamic learning will recognize that the following remarks focus on the two schools of thought that were most concerned with *tahqiq*, that is philosophy (*falsafa*) and theoretical Sufism (`*irfan*). As for dogmatic theology (*kalam*), although it has elements of intellectual learning, it is far too deeply rooted in the transmitted tradition and in certain theoretical commitments and methodological presuppositions to belong properly to it.

for themselves, they were imitators. Imitation cannot provide intellectual knowledge, only transmitted knowledge.

Generally speaking, four major areas were considered the proper domains of *tahqîq*: metaphysics, cosmology, psychology, and ethics.

Metaphysics is the study of the final reality that underlies all phenomena. The topic of discussion is God, although God is often called by impersonal names such as "Existence," or "the Necessary," or "the First."

Cosmology is the domain of the appearance and disappearance of the world. Where does the universe come from, and where does it go? Naturally, it comes from the First and goes back to the First. Yet how exactly does it come here, and how exactly does it return? The intellectual tradition maintained that it was possible to verify the actual route of the coming and the going. To the extent that "time and space" were discussed, these were relatively minor issues that arose in cosmology.

Psychology is the domain of the human soul or self. What is a human being? Where do human beings come from, and where do they go? Why are people so different from one another? How can people develop the potentialities given to them by God? How can they become everything that they should and must become if they are to be fully human?

Finally, ethics is the domain of practical wisdom. How does one train one's soul to obey the dictates of intelligence, follow the guidelines of God, and carry out one's everyday activities in harmony with God and the cosmos? What are the virtues of a healthy and wholesome soul? How can these virtues become the soul's second nature?

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It should be noted that the center of attention in all four domains is *nafs* - the self or soul. The human self is the key issue because the self alone can come to know God and the cosmos. The way it does this is by developing and refining its own inner power, which is called "intellect" or "heart." In order to develop and refine this power, people need to know what sort of self they are dealing with. You cannot know yourself by having the authorities or the experts tell you who you are. You do not reach knowledge of self from the outside, only from the inside. Until you know yourself from within yourself, your self-knowledge will be based on imitation, not verification.

All knowledge in the intellectual tradition was considered an aid in the process of coming to know oneself. The fully aware soul is the soul that has become fully itself. In other words, through being fully conscious of its own reality, the soul has become fully conscious of what God created it to be. The philosophers frequently called such a soul *`aql fa`il*. This expression is usually translated as "agent intellect." However, its meaning is much closer to "fully actualized intellect." This fully actualized intellect is the soul or self that has perfected both its theoretical and practical powers. Having become such an intellect, the self lives in harmony with God, the universe, and other human beings.

When the great masters of the tradition wrote about these four topics, they were writing about what they had verified, not simply what they had heard from someone else. They were highly critical of anyone who tried to understand these issues on the basis of transmission, imitation, or consensus. Intellectual questions demand intellectual answers, and the place to pose the questions and to understand the answers is within the human soul.

It needs to be kept in mind that most people do not have the ability or the energy or the urge to refine their own souls by striving to know themselves. It has generally been accepted that such

people should be satisfied with following the practical instructions of the prophets.  They should accept the words of God on the basis of faith - which itself is a passive mode of participation in the fully actualized intellect.  After all, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Faith is a light that God throws into the heart of whomsoever He wills."

So, the key to the Islamic intellectual tradition is precisely the "intellect."  And the intellect is nothing but the soul which God created and which has come to know itself as it. This God-given reality of human nature is often called *fitrah* or "innate disposition." If we employ the language of the Qur'an, the *fitrah* is the very self of Adam to whom God "taught all the names" (2:31).  The soul's *fitrah* is the primordial Adam present in every human being.  At root, the *fitrah* is good and wise, because it inclines naturally toward *tawhîd*, which is the assertion of God's unity that stands at the heart of every prophetic revelation and forms the basis for acquiring the true knowledge of things.

The problem that people face with their *fitrah* is that they are typically overcome by ignorance and forgetfulness.  As long as the soul stays ignorant and forgetful of God, it cannot know its own *fitrah* and cannot properly be called an "intellect."  First, it must actualize its original, innate disposition and come to know all the names taught to Adam.  Only then can it be called an "intellect" in the proper sense, that is, a fully actualized intellect.

To the extent that people fail to actualize their *fitrah*, they remain ignorant of who they are and the nature of the cosmos.  To the degree that they do actualize their *fitrah*, they come to understand things in their principles, or in their roots and realities. In other words, they grasp things as they are related to God.  They do not remain staring at surface phenomena and appearances. Rather, they see with God-given insight into the real names of things.  These names subsist eternally in the divine intelligence,

which is the very same spirit that God breathed into Adam after having molded his body of clay.

In short, the goal of the intellectual tradition was to help people come to know themselves so that they could achieve human perfection.  To achieve perfection, one had to perfect the theoretical intellect, which is the human self that knows all the realities and all the names, and the practical intellect, which is the human self that knows how to act correctly on the basis of the names taught by God.

From the perspective of this tradition, truly to know a thing is to know it in the context of the divine spirit, which comprehends all the names taught to Adam.  If we know things outside the divine context, we do not in fact know them, and to the extent that we think we know them, the disease of compound ignorance afflicts us.  The more confident we are about the truth of our knowledge, the more difficult it will be to cure the disease.  Moreover, it should be obvious that an action performed on the basis of ignorance - not to mention compound ignorance - leads to ill consequences, whether for the individual, or, if the action becomes general, for society and even for humanity.  A whole society built on compound ignorance has signed the certificate of its own destruction.

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## Intellectual Challenge

I stress again, according to the masters of the intellectual tradition, you cannot gain intellectual knowledge by listening to others or reading books.  You cannot do it by forming a committee or downloading it from the Internet.  You have to find it for yourself in yourself.  None the less, it is always useful to listen to what the great teachers have said in order to understand the nature of the quest.  When we do listen to them, we find that they agree on

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a large number of points, though they tend to use a great diversity of words and expressions to make these points. Mentioning a few of these can help us grasp what exactly pre-modern Muslim intellectuals were striving to understand and verify. Below are ten examples:

1. *Tawhîd* means that all of reality is unified in its principle. In other words, everything in the universe comes from God and returns to God. Moreover, *tawhîd* is always in effect, which is to say that everything is utterly and absolutely dependent upon God here and now, always and forever, in every time and in every space.

2**.** There is a permanent presence in the created order called "intellect" or "spirit" or "heart," which is the eternal light of God. All things are known to this intellect, because it is the pattern in terms of which both the universe and human beings were created.

3. The universe is a grand hierarchy of levels in which every domain of reality is present simultaneously, without regard to temporal succession. This hierarchy is ordered in an intelligent way, according to the wisdom of God, and it begins and ends in intellect, which is the shining light of God.

4. This hierarchical universe is divided into two basic worlds, visible and invisible. The invisible is the domain of spirit, light, intelligence, and awareness. The visible is the domain of body, darkness, ignorance, and unconsciousness. The invisible realm is closer to God and more real than the visible world. The visible, physical realm is the most amorphous, least intelligible, and least substantial of all real domains. Given its relative unreality and its subservient status, the physical realm has no control over the spiritual realm, just as created things have no control over God.

5. Human beings are unique in the created domain. God created them in His own image and taught them all the names. Because of

their innate knowledge of the names, everything found in the external universe is also found, in essence and reality, in the primordial human selfhood known as *fitrah*.

6. The final goal of religion and indeed, of all human endeavor, is to awaken the intellect in the heart. All human awareness of whatever sort is nothing but a glimmer of intellect, and there are infinite degrees of awakening. People are diverse in their aptitude for finding the divine light within themselves. The prophetic teachings are addressed to all people and are meant to guide everyone to the divine light - if not in this world, then in the next. The intellectual tradition is designed to guide those who have the capacity to develop their self-awareness by verification, here and now.

7. Our individual selves are identical with our awareness of things. We are what we know. The fullness of our original, innate disposition - our *fitrah* - is found in the fullness of understanding. The more we understand, the more human we are. The more forgetful we are, the less human we are. The more we imitate others in our intellectual knowledge, the more we fail to actualize our *fitrah* and the further we move from human perfection.

8. The theoretical and practical intellects need to be developed in harmony. The role of the theoretical intellect is to know things as they truly are, and the role of the practical intellect is to guide human beings in proper correct activity and behavior.

9. Seekers of knowledge should spend as little time as possible upon what is nowadays called the "real world," because this world is in fact the least real of all cosmic domains. They should busy themselves minimally with physical needs and concentrate on training their souls in self-knowledge. Anything more than what is necessary to secure one's bodily welfare - a modicum of food, clothing, and shelter - is excessive and dangerous to human aspirations.

**10.** The domain of mechanical contrivances - not to mention electronic devices - distracts people from their proper goals and can quickly become harmful to the soul. At its least harmful, this domain provides frivolous entertainment. At its most harmful, it can lead not only to catastrophes for the earth but also to the desolation of the human spirit.

# Thought Experiment

With this brief overview of the intellectual tradition behind us, let me perform a thought experiment. It is often imagined that if our ancestors could be brought from the past in a time machine, they would be amazed and dumbfounded by the feats of modern civilization. What I would like to do here, however, is to turn the tables a bit. I would like to imagine how a Muslim intellectual, brought back to us from the past, would react to the modern world, and in particular to its intellectual ambience. In other words, what would an al-Fârâbî, or an Ibn Sînâ, or a Mullâ Sadrâ think of contemporary science and scholarship? For the purpose of this experiment, I will borrow the name of our time-traveler from the famous philosophical novel of Ibn Tufayl and call him Hayy ibn Yaqzân, "the Living Son of the Awake." The name refers to the soul that has been born into eternal life by the awakening of the intellect within, the intellect that knows all the names taught to Adam.

How would Hayy ibn Yaqzân react to science and learning in the modern world? No doubt he would be astonished by the ready availability of an enormous amount of information. However, he would be much more astonished by the fact that people have no idea that all this information is irrelevant to the purpose of life. He would see that people's understanding of their true situation has decreased in inverse proportion to the amount of information they

have gathered.  The more "facts" they know, the less they understand their own selves and the world around them.

Hayy ibn Yaqzân would be appalled at the loss of any sense of the purpose of knowledge.  People think that they should gain knowledge to control their social and natural surroundings and to make their physical lives more comfortable.  In Hayy ibn Yaqzân's view, the "quest for knowledge" that the Prophet made incumbent upon all believers is not, however, a quest for information or a "better life."  Rather, it is a quest to understand the Qur'an and the Hadith, and then, on the basis of that understanding, it is a search for self-knowledge, self-awareness, and the understanding of God's signs (*âyât*) in the universe and the soul.   It is a quest for wisdom and mastery of oneself, not for control and manipulation of the world and society.

Hayy ibn Yaqzân would certainly be struck by the misuse of words like "scientist" and "intellectual."  He would immediately see that people use the word "scientist" to designate knowers of a knowledge that is considered uniquely true and reliable.  In fact, however, scientific knowledge is simply a means of understanding appearances so that they can be manipulated to achieve the desires of human egos.  To him, it would seem that what people call "science" is almost identical to what in his time was called "sorcery."  Certainly, the goal is exactly the same:  to manipulate God's creation, by recourse to means that escape ordinary human comprehension, for shortsighted human goals, if not for demonic ends.

As for the word "intellectual," Hayy ibn Yaqzân would think that an intellectual is someone who knows God, the world, and the human soul on the basis of verification, not imitation. Intellectuals are those who assert that they know only what they have verified for themselves and otherwise admit their ignorance. Hayy ibn Yaqzân would see, however, that modern scientists, intellectuals, and scholars have received all their knowledge by

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imitation, not verification. They take what they call "facts" from others, without verifying their truth, and then they proceed to build their own theories and practices on the facts, producing an endless proliferation of new facts that go back to no firm foundation in reality. Experts in the modern scientific and critical disciplines do know things as they are, but in terms of the consensus of their colleagues, mathematical constructs, theoretical fantasies, and ideological presuppositions.

Hayy ibn Yaqzân would see that wherever imitation is necessary - that is, in following the transmitted learning that goes back to the prophets - people act as if they themselves know what is best for human happiness. In contrast, wherever verification is necessary, people take everything that they have by way of imitation. Instead of trying to verify what they would like to know about the world and themselves, they revel in compound ignorance. They blindly and obediently accept current opinions, which have been learned from the mass media and educational institutions. Whenever anyone says "Scientists agree that. . .", they believe that it must be the truth, because it is the consensus of the true ulama. The great scientists of the day are idolized as the heroes of popular imagination and the divine guides to a bright new age.

Hayy ibn Yaqzân would think that the modern learned classes imagine that they know all sorts of things, but in fact they know nothing. Verified and realized knowledge carries with it the self-evidence of certainty, but people have no certainty about anything whatsoever. Since all their information and learning is of the transmitted variety, they do not know anything for themselves and in themselves. They have received their knowledge by way of the popular media, which treat the experts as if they were the modern priesthood - the theologians of science and the celebrants of technology.

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Hayy ibn Yaqzân would be amazed at the blatant polytheism that drives mental and social endeavor. A "god," after all, is that to which people turn their hopes and aspirations. *Tawhîd* is to acknowledge that there is only one proper object of aspiration. However, Hayy ibn Yaqzân would see that the modern world asserts a great multiplicity of gods. Of course, these are not called "gods," because people consider themselves far beyond primitive superstition. Rather, the gods have respectable, scientific-sounding names: Development, Education, Evolution, Gender, Health, Management, Modernization, Planning, Progress, Standard of Living, System, and Welfare. Whatever the gods may be called - and they have many, many names - they are sacred to modern society and worshiped everywhere.

Hayy ibn Yaqzân would be astonished by the degree to which people have lost sight of *tawhîd*. Instead of a worldview of *tawhîd*, he would see a worldview of *takthîr*. *Takthîr* is the opposite of *tawhîd*. *Tawhîd* means literally "to make one," and *takthîr* means "to make many." *Tawhîd* is to declare unity by asserting the truth of the One, who is the Absolute Reality. It is to recognize the primacy and ultimacy of the One Reality that rules the universe. *Tawhîd* is a way of seeing things that establishes correlation, balance, harmony, and coherence. In contrast, *takthîr* is to declare the primacy of many gods and many goals. It is a way of seeing things that induces dispersion, separation, partition, multiplicity, disconnected facts, incoherence, and confusion. It is the primary characteristic of the "information age." Hayy ibn Yaqzân would quickly see that all the technical, scientific, social, and political solutions that are offered to bring peace and harmony to the world simply intensify the reign of confusion.

Hayy ibn Yaqzân would be amazed that even scholars and scientists who consider themselves Muslims are convinced that the only way to know something truly is to begin with the many, not with the One. In his intellectual tradition, all thinking began with an

The Challenges to Islamic Intellectual Thought understanding of the Primal Unity that lies beneath and beyond surface multiplicity and that gives meaning to all things - from stars and celestial phenomena to minerals and plants, from prophetic teachings to the laws of logic and mathematics. Nevertheless, he would see Muslims declaring that modern science does not contradict *tawhîd* because it is simply a "method," or a way to understand mechanisms and workings. He would wonder at a blatant polytheism that thinks that there can be any real understanding of the many apart from the One that gives them their reality. How can Muslims not see that dealing with methods and mechanisms without reference to the Creator of the mind that devises the methods and mechanisms and without reference to the goals and aspirations of the devising mind is simply to set up a series of independent realities? To set up realities, objects, and methods without demonstrating explicitly how these are subservient to the laws of the One is precisely *shirk* - believing in real principles apart from the only Real Principle.

Along with a multiplicity of gods called by abstract, respectable names, Hayy ibn Yaqzân would see rank upon rank of priests serving the gods and encouraging their followers to immerse themselves in dispersion and confusion. He would see that each priesthood jealously guards its esoteric knowledge from the common people. He would see, however, that the common people - who consider themselves among the enlightened few in history, because they live in the era of scientific knowledge - no longer believe in priests. Hence they call the priests by honorable names like doctors, surgeons, physicists, biologists, engineers, sociologists, political scientists, programmers, lawyers, professors, and experts. Hayy ibn Yaqzân would be surprised that people think that these priests have a sacred, transmitted knowledge that is worthy of imitation and blind obedience.

Hayy ibn Yaqzân would be coming from a religious tradition that has a dim view of priests in the first place. So, he

would not be surprised to see that each contingent of priests contends with the other contingents for a greater share of wealth, prestige, and social control. He would perhaps be impressed by the enormous churches that the priests build for themselves in the names of their gods, the great cathedrals of Medicine, Technology, and Scholarship. However, the unspeakable rituals which some of the priests force upon their followers would horrify him. Especially shocking to him would be the "last rites" reserved for believers in the salvific powers of the god Medicine, rites that are carried out in chapels called "intensive care units."

Given Hayy ibn Yaqzân's natural skepticism about priests, he would be amazed at the way in which people surrender their free will to the priests and think that by doing so they are following the path of enlightened and progressive knowledge. He would recognize that no priest in the Middle Ages could have wanted a more subservient flock of sheep.

To make a long story short, Hayy ibn Yaqzân would be appalled not only by the intellectual level of the common people, but also by that of the learned classes. In both cases, he would see that people have lost any sense of what is truly real. He would be shocked by the way people immerse themselves in meaningless hopes and illusory endeavors. He would be dismayed by the willful blindness toward the permanent, everlasting, omnipresent reality that is the intelligent and intelligible light of God. He would be aghast at the loss of any sense of the hierarchical structure of the cosmos and the soul, at the flattening of the world that makes material appearance seem to be the only reality. He would be astonished that people have surrendered their freedom to the esoteric knowledge of priests. He would be amazed that a class known as "intellectuals" thinks that *tawhîd* and everything considered worthy of veneration and aspiration in past times were nothing but misguided delusions, self-serving fantasies, rationales

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for social injustice, and epiphenomena of psychological contingencies.

As for Muslims living in the modern world, he would be dumbfounded that most of them accept the gods and priests just like the non-Muslims. Furthermore, perhaps what would truly sadden him is that Muslim parents have lost any sense of how to guide their children in the path of *tawhîd*. Almost universally, they have come to believe that religion (*dîn*) means ignorance and superstition, and that studying the Muslim intellectual heritage is a total waste of time, since it has been replaced with knowledge that is "scientific" (that is, "respectable" - how many of them really understand what "scientific" implies?). They refuse to allow their children to study religion (*al-tafaqquh fî al-dîn*) except when all other avenues of "advancement" are shut. Medicine, science, and engineering are the professions of choice,and - in North America at least - law, since lawyers enjoy a high income.

But - horror of horrors!—that a Muslim youngster should want to learn about his own transmitted and intellectual traditions in a serious way. Parents are afraid that their children will turn into narrow-minded mullahs. Notice, however, that *mullahs* are precisely those Muslim scholars who specialize in transmitted learning and, generally speaking, have no knowledge of the intellectual tradition. So, instead of allowing their children to search for knowledge in the way that Muslims have been commanded, modern-day parents insist that they join one of the priesthoods. Although the learning that their children gain is still of the transmitted variety, joining the priesthood of doctors is much more respectable - not to mention lucrative - than becoming a mullah. After all, how can the prophets and religions of the past compare with Darwin, Einstein, and Science?

Time, Space, and Motion in Islam
I'm afraid that, after taking a quick look around, Hayy ibn Yaqzân would be anxious to climb back into his time machine and return to a sane world.

William C. Chittick