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## UNIT 2 PHILOSOPHY OF ISLAM

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### Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Philosophy of God in Islam
- 2.3 Philosophy of the Human Person in Islam
- 2.4 Philosophy of World in Islam
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Key Words
- 2.7 Further Readings and References

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### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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The aim of this paper is to make the students acquainted with the background, origin, content, and development of Islamic Philosophy. In this endeavor it will also bring out the relevant philosophical debates and its significance today by analyzing the Islamic Philosophy of God, Man and World.

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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Islamic Philosophy represents the style of philosophy produced within the framework of Islamic culture. The main sources of classical or early Islamic philosophy are the religion of Islam itself, especially ideas derived and interpreted from the Quran. Many of the early philosophical debates centered on reconciling religion and reason, the latter exemplified by Greek philosophy. One aspect which stands out in Islamic philosophy is that the philosophy in Islam travels wide but comes back to conform it to the Quran and *Sunna* (Islamic oral tradition).

The first of the Islamic philosophers, Abu Ya'qub al-Kindi wrote in his *On First Philosophy*, "Philosophy is the knowledge of the reality of things within people's possibility, because the philosopher's end in theoretical knowledge is to gain truth and in practical knowledge to behave in accordance with truth" (S.Strouma:1963:424). Al-Farabi, while accepting this definition, added the distinction between philosophies based on certainty (*al-yaqiniyyah*), hence demonstration and philosophy based on opinion (*al-maznunah*) (M. Mahdi 1969:153-7), and hence dialectic and sophistry, and insisted that philosophy was the mother of the sciences and dealt with everything that exists. Ibn Sina again accepted the earlier definition while making certain precisions of his own. In his *Uyun al-hikmah*, he says "*Al-hikmah* (which he uses as being the same as philosophy) is the perfection of the human soul through conceptualization of things and judgment of theoretical and practical realities to the measure of human ability" (Ed. Abdurrahman Badawi, 1954:16).

The philosophical activity in the Islamic world is not simply a regurgitation of Greco- Alexandrian philosophy which grew despite the presence of the Qur'an and Hadith. On the contrary, Islamic philosophy is what it is precisely because

it flowered in a universe whose contours are determined by the Qur'anic revelation. We must note that Islamic philosophy is essentially a 'prophetic philosophy' based on the hermeneutics of a sacred text, which is the result of a revelation that is inalienably linked to the microcosmic intellect, and which alone is able to actualize the dormant possibilities of the intellect within us. Islamic Philosophy deals with the One or Pure Being, with universal existence, and with all the grades of the universal hierarchy. It deals with man and his entelechy, and with the cosmos and the final return of all things to God. This interpretation of existence is none other than penetration into the inner meaning of the Qur'an which 'is' existence itself, the Book whose mediation provides the key for the understanding of those objective and subjective orders of existence, with which the Islamic philosopher has been concerned over the ages.

In early Islamic thought, which refers to philosophy during the 'Islamic Golden Age' traditionally dated between the 8th and 12th centuries, two main currents may be distinguished. The first is *Kalam* that mainly dealt with Islamic theological questions, and the other is *Falsafa*, that was founded on interpretations of Aristotelianism and Neo-Platonism. Attempts were made by philosopher-theologians at harmonizing both trends, notably by Ibn Sina (Avicenna) who founded the school of Avicennism, Ibn Rushd (Averroes) who founded the school of Averroism, and others such as Ibn al-Haytham and Abu Rayhan al-Biruni.

The Islamic world outlook revolves around three elements. They are:

- 1) God is Transcendental and One
- 2) Man is created by God and has a transcendental nature. He is made the centre of the Universe.
- 3) The world has been created for a purpose and is blessed with meaning. The human being is seen as the viceroy (*toughlifa*) of God in nature.

Following the above essence of Islamic Philosophy, our discussion is divided into three aspects: Islamic Philosophy of God, Islamic Philosophy of Human Person, and Islamic Philosophy of World.

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## 2.2 PHILOSOPHY OF GOD IN ISLAM

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According to Islam, God, known in Arabic as Allah, is the all-powerful and all-knowing creator, sustainer, and judge of the universe. Islam lays heavy emphasis on the conceptualization of God as strictly singular (*tawhid*). God is unique (*wahid*) and inherently one (*ahad*), all-merciful, and omnipotent. According to tradition there are 99 names of God (*al-asma al-husna*). All these names refer to Allah the supreme and all-comprehensive divine name. Among the 99 names of God, the most famous and most frequent of these names are 'the Compassionate' (*al-rahman*) and the 'Merciful' (*al-rahim*). According to Islamic teachings, God exists without a place. According to the Qur'an, "No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision. God is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things" (Q. 6:103). God in Islam is not only majestic and sovereign, but also a personal God: according to the Qur'an, God is nearer to a person than his jugular vein (Q. 50:16). God responds to those in need or distress whenever they call. Above all, God guides humanity to the right way, "the holy way".

## Tawhid (Oneness of God)

Oneness of God or *tawhid* is the act of believing and affirming that God is one and unique (*wahid*). The Qur'an asserts the existence of a single and absolute truth that transcends the world; a unique and indivisible being who is independent of the entire creation. According to the Qur'an: *Say, He is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute: He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him* (112:1-4). *Thy lord is self-sufficient, full of Mercy: if it were God's will, God could destroy you, and in your place appoint whom God will as your successors, even as God raised you up from the posterity of other people*" (6:133). According to Vincent J. Cornell, the Qur'an also provides a monist image of God by describing the reality as a unified whole, with God being a single concept that would describe or ascribe all existing things: "God is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward; God is the knower of everything (Q. 57:3)" Some Muslims have however vigorously criticized interpretations that would lead to a monist view of God for what they see as blurring the distinction between the creator and the creature, and its incompatibility with the radical monotheism of Islam. The indivisibility of God implies the indivisibility of God's sovereignty which in turn leads to the conception of the universe as a just and coherent moral universe rather than an existential and moral chaos. Similarly, the Qur'an rejects the binary modes of thinking, such as the idea of the duality of God, by arguing that both good and evil generate from God's creative act and that the evil forces have no power to create anything. God in Islam is a universal God rather than a local, tribal, or parochial one; an absolute who integrates all affirmative values and brooks no evil. Muslims believe that the entirety of the Islamic teaching rests on the principle of *Tawhid*.

## Essence and Existence in Islamic Philosophy

Ibn Sina, one of the prominent philosophers of Islam, stated that God is the only existing being which is necessary in itself, and everything else in existence has been brought into existence only by God. Everything that can exist is logically possible as an existent, but it needs something to move it from potentiality to actuality, and this ultimately is God. God puts in train a sequence of change which eventually results in everything which really could exist. This might seem to be wrong, since surely there are things that could exist, but never will, since they will never be moved into existence, as it were. This is certainly the case for Ibn Sina; there are possible things that remain possible forever, since they are never going to be brought into existence. To exist, a thing needs something to bring it into existence. There is an interesting similarity between this theory and that of his chief opponent, al-Ghazali, who also argues that for something to exist, something must move it into existence, and that something is also ultimately God. Both Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali make a firm distinction between existence and essence. For the former, only God has an essence that makes it inevitable that he will exist; everything else in existence has been brought into existence by something else. For al-Ghazali, there can

also never have been a time when God did not exist, and everything that does exist is both brought into existence and kept in existence through the power of God. If God decide not to maintain the force for existence as it were, then the things that previously existed would go out of existence, in just the same way that if someone does not keep up the payments on a house mortgage, the house will be repossessed.

Ibn Rushd criticizes both these views. He argues that the distinction between existence and essence made by Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali suggests that something has to come from outside a thing, as it were, to bring that thing into existence. For example, when a piece of cotton wool is burnt in a flame and we get ash, something produces that ash, which ultimately is different from the cotton wool and the flame themselves. According to al-Ghazali, what creates the ash is really God, and anything could lead to ash were God to command it. But Ibn Rushd counters this with the argument that what is meant by ash is something which is produced in a certain way, so that its existence is very much part of its essence. What happens to the ash has to happen to the ash, since it is ash, and there is nothing outside it that could lead to a different state of affairs. One cannot, except in a logical sense, distinguish between what things are and whether they exist, since whether they exist is a part of what they are.

Ibn Rushd would claim that God is responsible for the organization of the world in the first place, but that does not mean that he could have created any sort of world at all. He obviously created a world that is rational and well structured, a world that provides us with guidance as to how to live and what to believe. Could he have created another sort of world, one in which there is neither order nor a user-friendly structure? If God is really what we mean by God, he is obliged to produce a world which embodies intelligence and general benevolence; he cannot do anything else. The view of God's links with the world that Ibn Rushd has, is even more restricted than that of Ibn Sina. For the latter, God is the ultimate cause of everything which exists; but it is not clear whether, once a thing has passed the test of possibility, God can prevent it from coming into existence. God is rather in the position of a constitutional monarch, who is required to sign the legislation passed by parliament, which makes the legislation 'royal', and thus legal. But all that the Crown does in this sort of situation is to rubber-stamp, as it were, a decision which has already been taken elsewhere.

All the philosophers accept that God is a perfect agent, in that there is nothing to prevent him acting when he wishes to act, and no deficiencies of knowledge or motivation either. A divine action is perfect, in that it is carried out entirely rationally, with no desire for personal gain and in total understanding of the situation to which the action is applied. It follows that the notion of the agency that constitutes the perfect concept is in fact rather thin, since it is distant from what we would call an agency. For example, we might do something just to prove that we can do it, and since we act in a context of incomplete information, our actions are often misplaced and inefficient in attaining their ends. This is very different from God's actions, which are in complete accordance with a perfect view of the situation, and which are not restricted by problems of finitude and materiality.

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

1) What is the Philosophy of God in Islam?

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2) What is the Philosophy of God and creation?

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3) Bring out the philosophical debate between Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd in relation to essence and existence.

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## 2.3 PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN PERSON IN ISLAM

### Human Person from the Qur'anic Perspective

The story of Adam as portrayed in the Qur'an shows that in the course of his material development and physiological changes, man reached a stage where he obtained a new birth with the infusion of the Divine spirit. Then in the course of his normal development, he suddenly experienced a divine change as the result of which he was transformed into such a super being that even the angels were asked to pay obeisance and the world forces were made subservient to him. The forbidden Tree of Paradise as stated in the Bible is not that knowledge which should not be approached, but it is a tree of lust which should be controlled. It is a means by which man tests his will-power of self-control. Even man's disobedience is a symbol of the freedom granted to him by Allah. To have access to 'knowledge' is not forbidden to him; in fact, it is a gift with which he has been especially blessed. Allah taught him that which none else knew. Knowledge is one of the factors by which man gained superiority over angels.

Even Adam's expulsion from Paradise was a forerunner of a sort of self-sufficiency, the blooming of his talents and the beginning of his creative struggle. It was a stage preliminary to his self-making. Though the 'fall' came in the wake of disobedience, it did not culminate in condemnation and permanent contempt. As the result of seeking forgiveness and attaining self-consciousness, it became a matter of blessing. One of the most important sources of knowledge, and the domains of thinking, is Divine revelation. The world is not dark and void. In addition to those inner faculties with which Allah has provided man in order to help him find the truth, He has sent Prophets to guide him on the right way.

The guidance does not mean forced imposition of Allah's will, nor does it mean the suppression of the creative will of man. It shows the kindness and graciousness of Allah. This guidance is a light which adds to the insight of man and does not restrict his will. Man should be benefitted by this guidance with his eyes wide open, and for that purpose, he should use his knowledge and insight. He should first think and evaluate, and only then make his choice. If even after identifying the truth he persists in his disbelief, he shall stand condemned.

Man is a part of nature, having material and natural characteristics. But he has reached such a stage of evolution that he has become fit for being gifted with the Divine spirit and supernatural values. Consequently he has acquired the faculties of free will, knowledge, and responsibility. Because of these gifts, he is neither subservient to material phenomena nor bound by genetic relationships. In contrast, he is capable of subduing nature and bringing about changes in material relationships and natural phenomena. It is also believed in Islam that man is an integral part of society and an independent being. He is not so subservient to society that he should have no personal will, freedom, or the right of choice. His conduct is not determined by society and history alone, though he cannot be regarded as being apart from society.

As the entire existence of man is not the direct result of the evolution of matter, his mental and intellectual life cannot be purely inspired by and derived from matter or from material and genetic relationships of society. Nevertheless, as he is embedded in matter and has emerged out of it, the natural, geographical, and physical conditions, and the material relationship of society are bound to affect him. The contradiction which exists within man is the outcome of the conflict between his material yearning and his celestial impulses. As man is endowed with freedom and knowledge, he should make the best use of this contradiction, and should take steps to modify all his impulses and guide them towards his own evolution, the betterment of his surroundings, the making of history, and moving it forward.

### **Philosophy of Soul**

In Islam particular problems arose in the discussions concerning the nature of the soul. According to the version of Aristotle, which was generally used by the Islamic philosophers, the soul is an integral part of the person as its form, and once the individual dies the soul also disappears. This appears to contravene the notion of an afterlife which is so important a part of Islam. Even Platonic views of the soul seem to insist on its spirituality, as compared with the very physical accounts of the Islamic afterlife. Many of the philosophers tried to get around this by arguing that the religious language discussing the soul is only allegorical, and is intended to impress upon the community at large that there is a wider context within which their lives take place, which extends further than those lives themselves. They could argue in this way because of theories which presented a sophisticated view of the different types of meaning that a statement may have in order to appeal to different audiences and carry out a number of different functions. Although the Qur'an encourages its followers to discover facts about the world, it is through the philosophy of science that we can understand the theoretical principles which lie behind that physical reality.



Islam agrees that knowledge is possible. Knowledge is the intellect's grasp of the immaterial forms, the pure essences or universals that constitute the natures of the things, and human happiness is achieved only through the intellect's grasp of such universals. There are a very large number of references to knowledge in the Qur'an and the Hadith, both the desirability of acquiring knowledge and the limitations of knowledge (Nuseibeh 1996; Mohamed 2006). The Muslim philosophers consider knowledge to be the grasping of the immaterial forms, natures, essences, or realities of things. They are in consensus that the forms of things are either material or immaterial (existing in themselves). While the latter can be known as such, the former cannot be known unless first detached from their materiality. Once in the mind, the pure forms act as the pillars of knowledge. The mind constructs objects from these forms, and with these objects it makes judgment. Thus Muslim Philosophers, like Aristotle before them, divided knowledge in the human mind into conception (*tasawwur*) or apprehension of an object with no judgment, and assent (*tasdiq*) or apprehension of an object with a judgment; according to them the latter being a mental relation of correspondence between the concept and the object for which it stands. Conceptions are the main pillars of assent; without conception, one cannot have judgment. In itself, conception is not subject to truth and falsity, but assent is. However, it should be pointed out that *tasdiq* is a misleading term in Islamic philosophy. It is generally used in the sense of accepting truth or falsity, but also occasionally in the sense of accepting only truth. One must keep in mind, however, that when assent is said to be a form of knowledge, the word then is not used in the broad sense to mean true or false judgment, but in the narrow sense to mean true judgment.

In the Islamic Philosophy, conceptions are mainly divided into the known and the unknown. The former are actually grasped by the mind and the latter potentially. Known conceptions are either self-evident (i.e., objects known to normal human minds with immediacy such as 'being', 'thing', and 'necessary') or acquired (i.e., objects known through mediation, such as 'triangle'). Conceptions are known or unknown, relative to the individual mind. Similarly, Muslim philosophers divided assent into the known and or unknown, and the known assent into self-evident and the acquired. The self-evident assent is exemplified by 'the whole is greater than the part' and the acquired by 'the world is composite'.

### Source of Knowledge

There are two theories about the manner in which the number of unknown objects is reduced. One theory stresses that this reduction is brought about by moving from known objects to unknown ones, the other that it is merely the result of direct illumination given by the divine world. The former is the upward or philosophical way, the second the downward or prophetic one. According to the former theory, movement from the known objects of conceptions to the unknown ones can be effected chiefly through the explanatory phrase (*al-qawl ash-sharih*). The proof (*al-burhan*) is the method for moving from the known objects of assent to the unknown ones. The explanatory phrase and proof can be valid or invalid; the former leads to certitude, the latter to falsehood. The validity and invalidity of the explanatory phrase and proof can be determined by logic, which is a set of rules for such determination. Ibn Sina, the greatest philosopher of Islam, points out that logic is a necessary key to knowledge

and cannot be replaced except by God's guidance, as opposed to other types of rules, such as, grammar for discourse (which can be replaced by a good natural mind). By distinguishing the valid from the invalid explanatory phrase and proof, logic serves a higher purpose, namely that of disclosing the natures or essences of things. It does this because conceptions reflect the realities or natures of things and are the cornerstones of the explanatory phrase and proof. Because logic deals only with expressions that correspond to conceptions, when it distinguishes the valid from the invalid it distinguishes at the same time the realities or nature of things from their opposites. Thus logic is described as the key to the knowledge of the natures of things. This knowledge is described as the key to happiness; hence the special status of logic in Islamic Philosophy.

### **Philosophy of Mind**

Islamic Philosophy believes that above the senses there is the rational soul. This has two parts: the practical and theoretical intellects. The theoretical intellect is responsible for knowledge; the practical intellect concerns itself only with the proper management of the body through apprehension of particular things, so that it can do the good and avoid the bad. All the major Muslim philosophers, beginning with al-Kindi, wrote treatises on the nature and function of the theoretical intellect, which may be referred to as the house of knowledge.

In addition to the senses and the theoretical intellect, Muslim philosophers include a third factor in their discussion of the instruments of knowledge. They teach that the divine world contains, among other things, intelligences, the lowest of which is what al-Kindi calls the First Intellect (*al-'aql al-awwal*), better known in Arabic philosophy as the 'agent intellect' (*al-aql al-fa''al*), the name given to it by al-Farabi or 'the giver of forms' (*wahib as-suwar*). They contend that the world around us is necessary for the attainment of philosophical knowledge. Some such as Ibn Rushd and occasionally Ibn Sina, say that the mixed universals in the imagination that have been derived from the outside world through the senses are eventually purified completely by the light of the agent intellect, and are then reflected onto the theoretical intellect. Al-Farabi's and Ibn Sina's general view, however, is that these imagined universals only prepare the theoretical intellect for the reception of the universals from the agent intellect that already contains them.

When expressing this view, Ibn Sina states that it is not the universals in the imagination themselves that are transmitted to the theoretical intellect but their shadow, which is created when the light of the agent intellect is shed on these universals. This is similar, he says to the shadow of an object which is reflected on the eye when sunlight is cast on the object. While the manner in which the universals in the imagination can prepare the theoretical intellect for knowledge is in general unclear, it is vaguely remarked by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina that this preparation is due to the similarity of these universals to the pure universals, and to the familiarity of the theoretical intellect with the imagined universals owing to its proximity to the imagination. In other words, the familiarity of this intellect with what resembles its proper objects prepares it for the reception of these objects from the agent intellect.

### **Philosophic and Prophetic Knowledge**

The prophetic way is a much easier and simpler path. One need not take any action to receive the divinely given universals; the only requirement seems to be the possession of a strong soul capable of receiving them. While the



philosophical way moves from the imagination upward to the theoretical intellect, the prophetic way takes the reverse path, from the theoretical intellect to the imagination. For this reason, knowledge of philosophy is knowledge of the natures of things themselves, while knowledge of prophecy is knowledge of the natures of things as wrapped up in symbols and the shadows of the imagination. Philosophical and prophetic truths are the same, but are attained and expressed differently. One of the most important contributions of Islamic philosophy is the attempt to reconcile Greek philosophy and Islam by accepting the philosophical and prophetic paths as leading to the same truth.

Muslim philosophers agree that knowledge is the theoretical intellect that passes through stages. It moves from potentiality to actuality and from actuality to reflection on actuality, thus giving the theoretical intellect the respective names of potential intellect, actual intellect and acquired intellect. Some Muslim philosophers explain that the last is called 'acquired' because its knowledge comes to it from the outside, and so it can be said to acquire it. The acquired intellect is the highest human achievement, a holy state that conjoins the human and the divine realms by conjoining the theoretical and agent intellects.

Following the footsteps of Alexander of Aphrodisias, al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja and Ibn Rushd believe that the theoretical intellect is potential by nature, and therefore disintegrates unless it grasps the eternal object, the essential universals, for the known and the knower are one. Ibn Sina rejects the view that the theoretical intellect is potential by nature. He argues instead that it is eternal by nature because unless it is, it cannot grasp the eternal objects. For him, happiness is achieved by this intellect's grasping of the eternal objects, for such grasping perfects the soul. Muslim philosophers who believe that eternity is attained only through knowledge also agree with Ibn Sina that knowledge is perfection and perfection is happiness.

Muslims argue if there is really only God, and the world is just an aspect of his being, then what we count as knowledge is really only an aspect of what is knowledge for God, the perfect and perspicuous grasp of the nature of reality – namely, himself. The whole project of reconciling Scripture and philosophy or science is based on the notion that there is really just one truth, which may be approached in different ways.

Muslim philosophers agree that knowledge is possible. Knowledge is the intellect's grasp of the immaterial forms, the pure essences or universals that constitute the natures of things and human happiness is achieved only through the intellect's grasp of such universals. They stress that for knowledge of the immaterial forms the human intellect generally relies on the senses. Some philosophers, such as, Ibn Rushd and occasionally Ibn Sina, assert that it is the material forms themselves, which the senses provide, that are grasped by the intellect after being stripped of their materiality with the help of the divine world. However, the general view as expressed by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina seems to be that the material forms only prepare the way for the reception of the immaterial forms, which are then provided by the divine world. They also state that on rare occasions the divine world simply bestows the immaterial forms on the human intellect without any help from the senses. This occurrence is known as prophecy. While all Muslim philosophers agree that grasping eternal entities ensures happiness, they differ as to whether such grasping is also necessary for eternal existence.

**Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

- 1) What is the philosophical status of the Human Person in the Qur'an?

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- 2) Bring out the epistemological concept of man from the perspective of knowledge and mind.

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- 3) How do you perceive the concept of Prophetic Knowledge in Islam?

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## 2.4 PHILOSOPHY OF WORLD IN ISLAM

The Qur'an vividly brings out the philosophy of the world in the following words: "Your Lord is God, who created the heavens and earth in six days. He then mounted the Throne, covering day with night, which pursues it urgently – and the sun, moon, and stars subservient, by his command. Verily, his are the creation and the command. Blessed be God, the Lord of all being. Call on your lord, humbly and secretly. He loves not transgressors. Do not do corruption in the land after it has been set right. Call upon him in awe and eagerly. Surely the grace of God is nigh to the good-doers. It is he who lets loose the winds, bearing good tidings before his grace, till, when they are charged with heavy clouds, we drive it to the dead land and use it to send down water and bring forth all fruits" (7:54-58).

Islamic Philosophy always considered observing and contemplating nature as a very important aspect of their spiritual journey. Islam is the name of the Divine system of the universe. The Book of Islam is "the recorded Qur'an (*al-Qur'an al-tadwini*)" and the entire universe is the "Qur'an of creation (*al-Qur'an al-takwini*)". Humanity is also the Divine Book that corresponds to the Qur'an and the universe. Given this, designating the Qur'anic verse, events taking place within our souls and all phenomena occur within nature. Human life is so interrelated with natural phenomena that those who can discern them can draw absolutely correct conclusions about the world's future. In other words, the laws of history can be deduced from the laws of nature.

In Islam, day and night symbolize happy moments and misfortunes respectively, which alternate in both a person's and a nation's life. Rain, the symbol of Divine Grace, is mentioned as the grace of God, which is close to those who do

well. The winds bearing the good tidings of rain correspond to the pioneers or leaders of a religion's revival, and their message is likened to heavy clouds of rain. Hearts without faith and minds without good judgment and sound reasoning resemble dead lands that need rain to be made fruitful. Just as a fertile land's vegetation emerges by its lord's leave, hearts and minds ready for the Divine Message are the courses from which faith, knowledge, and virtues radiate. However, there always will be some desert-like minds and hearts that do not receive ever, there always will be some desert-like minds and hearts that do not receive enough rain to produce any vegetation and so do not benefit from this grace.

For Muslims, revelation is inseparable from the cosmic revelation, which is also a book of God. By refusing to separate humanity from nature, Islam preserves an integral view of the universe and sees the flow of Divine grace in the arteries of the cosmic and natural order. As we seek to transcend nature from its very bosom, nature can be an aid in this process, provided we learn to contemplate it as a mirror reflecting a higher reality. In the creation of the heavens and Earth and in the alternation of night and day, there are signs for people with minds, who remember God and mention His name, standing and sitting and on their sides, and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and Earth. "Our Lord, You have not created this for vanity. Glory is to You! Guard us against the chastisement of the Fire" (Quran 3:190-91).

### **Humankind and the Nature**

According to Islamic Philosophy humankind is located at the axis and centre of the cosmic milieu. By being taught the names of all things, we receive the keys to knowledge of all things and so gain domination over them. However, we receive this power only in our capacity as serving as God's vicegerent (*khalifa*) on earth, not as a rebel against heaven. In fact, humanity is the channel of grace for nature, for our active participation in the spiritual world causes light to enter the world of nature. Due to our intimate connection with nature, our inner state is reflected in the external order. Thus, when our inner being turns to darkness and chaos, nature turns from harmony and beauty to disequilibrium and disorder. We see ourselves reflected in nature, and penetrate into nature's inner meaning by delving into our own inner depths. Those who live on the surface of their being can study nature as something to be manipulated and dominated, while those who turn towards the inner dimension of their existence can recognize nature as a symbol and come to understand it in the real sense. The concept of humanity and nature, as well as the presence of a metaphysical doctrine and a hierarchy of knowledge, enabled Islam to develop many sciences that were influential in the modern development of science in the West and yet did not disturb Islam's intellectual edifice. Ibn Sina was a physician and Peripatetic philosopher and yet expounds his 'Oriental Philosophy' that sought knowledge through illumination. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi was the leading mathematician and astronomer of his day as well as the author of an outstanding treatise on Sufism. Muhy al-Din ibn al-Arabi was a leading personage in the most esoteric dimension of Sufism and yet explained the universe's expansion and the motion of objects. Jabir ibn al-Hayyan's adherence to Sufism did not prevent him from founding algebra and chemistry. Ibrahem Haqqi of Erzurum, a well-known seventeenth-century Sufi master, was a brilliant astronomer and mathematician as well as a specialist in the occult sciences.

Islam is the universal order, the integral religion of harmony, and the unique system that harmonizes the physical with the metaphysical, the rational with the ideal, and the corporeal with the spiritual. Each dimension of our earthly life has its own place within Islam's matrix and thus can perform its own function, enable us to be at peace with ourselves and our community and nature, and gain happiness in both worlds.

### The Philosophy of Science

Islamic philosophy has always had a rather difficult relationship with the Islamic sciences, those techniques for answering theoretical questions which are closely linked with the religion of Islam, comprising law, theology, language, and the study of the religious texts themselves.

Some Muslims have argued that Islam is more compatible with science than other religions, pointing out that the Islamic world saw in the past a great flourishing of the natural sciences (Baker 1996; Nasr 1996; Shamsher Ali 2006). According to Islamic belief, by contrast with the monolithic structure of Western science, Islamic science is pluralistic and inclusive of different approaches to scientific work. Western science is positivistic and insists on complete freedom to do as it wishes. The Western scientist is individualistic and believes that whatever she wishes to study is acceptable as an object of study. The Islamic approach, by contrast, argues that science is really just an alternative form of worship that operates within a social and spiritual context, and anything outside that context has no value. Given the principle of *tawhid*, the unity of God, there is no scope for claiming that a part of our lives (our scientific lives perhaps) is in the position of *khilafa* or trustees of the welfare of the world, as a result of our divinely sanctioned role. The point is that we are not allowed to dominate the world or treat it as an external object. On the contrary, we are obliged to treat both the world and ourselves as parts of the divine creation, so we must treat possible objects of enquiry with the respect that their ultimate nature requires. Knowledge, then, is not a neutral attempt to grasp an external object, as it is for positivistic science, but rather an aspect of worship, and an activity carried out for a purpose, which leads to the conclusion that there are forms of knowledge that are not worth pursuing.

The main point which modern defenders of Islamic science make is that both Islam and natural science rest on a particular attitude towards rationality. The sort of rationality employed by science involves faith, just as much as does religion. At different times there are different approaches to science, and these have a lot to do with the sort of society in which science is produced. In that sense, then, science rests on nothing more secure than does religion. Both involve faith in a set of principles which in themselves lack justification. The main advantage of the notion of an Islamic science is that it is permissive with respect to methodology, and in that it broadens the concept of knowledge to allow a wide variety of different understandings of what knowledge is, so that at the same time it permits a variety of different ways of knowing. These different ways are all equally valid, even though some of them may be quite personal and apparently subjective.

It is worth being skeptical about the practical implications of the idea of an Islamic science, since the Qur'anic pronouncements on the topic are so general. Natural phenomena are signs (*ayat*) of the existence and nature of God (16:66; 41:53; 51:20-1; 88:17-20) and hence are flawless (67:3). The world is organized

and has a direction (3:191; 21:16; 38:27). Human beings are God's *khalifa* (2:30; 6:165) and there are certainly warnings against waste and mismanagement of those things that God has provided. But what these directions actually mean is far from obvious.

### **Islamic Ethics**

Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites were the two schools that shaped the Islamic Ethics. According to the Mu'tazilites, ethical meaning is entirely subjective, in that whatever meaning it has it gets from a subject, in this case, God. The only point is that acting morally lies in obeying God, and any other feature of ethics is purely superficial. That is, it might look as though there are good practical reasons for moral actions, and there could be such factors, but they are not relevant to our rationale for acting morally. These factors are what Kant called 'heteronomous', in that they appeal to a side of us that is certainly worth appealing to, but not in the ethical sense. For Kant, we should do our duty out of a pure desire to do our duty, and if we do our duty out of a desire to please God, then our behavior might be in accordance with morality, but is not done for a moral motive. The Ash'arites make a similar claim. They insist that unless a moral action is performed out of a desire to act in accordance with God's wishes, it is not moral. This is because what morality means is action in accordance with God's wishes and commands, as opposed to immorality, which is action in line with what God forbids. Unless we understand this, we really have no chance of acting from the correct motive, which is of course crucial to the nature of virtue. We would not praise someone for his or her behavior if it stemmed from incorrect motives, and even the wrong action carried out with the right motive is excusable (Frank 1996).

The Mu'tazilites took an entirely different approach. They maintained that while it is true that God commands us to do what is right, what is right is right independently of what God orders. He orders us to do what is right because it is right, and it is right on objective grounds, not because of what God orders. God could not order us to do something that was not right, since the rules of morality are not something that is under his control. He can see much better than we can why certain actions ought to be performed, and we are often obliged to look to him for guidance; but all he knows better than us is the route to virtue. He does not know what virtue is in the sense that he creates it. So the role of religion is to help us work out how we should behave. It does this by indicating forms of conduct and advising us how to think of our duties, but it does not establish the nature of our duty. This is worked out in the nature of morality itself. Suppose the case of a good person who suffers during this life. What will happen to him after his death? According to the Mu'tazilites, God must reward him for his behavior, since if he does not, he will be acting unfairly. God has no choice but to compensate him in the next life for what he has suffered in this one and the reverse would be true of the evil person. God is thus forced to behave in certain ways, since if he is to be just (and he is by definition just), he must follow the rules of justice (Hourani 1971).

### **Political Philosophy**

Political Philosophy in Islam looked to Greek thinkers for ways of understanding the nature of the state, yet also generally linked Platonic ideas of the state to Qur'anic notions, which is not difficult given the basically hierarchical nature of both types of account. Even thinkers attracted to Illuminationist Philosophy,



such as al-Dawani, wrote on political philosophy, arguing that the structure of the state should represent the material and spiritual aspects of the citizens. Through a strict differentiation of role in the state, and through leadership by those skilled in religious and philosophical knowledge, everyone would find an acceptable place in society and scope for spiritual perfection to an appropriate degree.

### Mystical Philosophy

Mystical philosophy in Islam represents a persistent tradition of working philosophically within the Islamic world. One of the main topics of concern to those interested in mysticism is the nature of *tawhid*, or unity of God. Ahmad Sirhindi (971/1564-1033/1624) with his doctrine of unity of consciousness (*wahdat ak-shuhud*) developed this philosophy of mysticism in Islam. According to this philosophy God and the world are identical, so that when we differentiate between them, we are just adopting an uncritical way of speaking which does not capture the true state of reality. According to this philosophy by contrast, that God and nature are distinct and that the latter is a reflection of aspects of the former, Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1114/1703-1176/1762), the outstanding Muslim thinker of the Indian subcontinent, argued that this debate was really more about language than about philosophical concepts, and that these two views are easily reconcilable (Kemal and Kemal 1996). However, Al-Ghazali had great influence in making mysticism in its Sufi form respectable, but it is really other thinkers such as al-Suhrawardi and Ibn al-Arabi who produced actual systematic mystical thought. They created, albeit in different ways, accounts of how to do philosophy which accords with mystical approaches to reality. Ibn al-Arabi concentrated on analyzing the different levels of reality and the links which exist between them, while al-Suhrawardi is the main progenitor of illuminations philosophy. This tries to replace Aristotelian logic and metaphysics with an alternative based on the relationship between light as the main principle of creation and knowledge, and that which is lit up, i.e., the rest of reality.

The whole point of mysticism is to provide a taste (*dhawq*) of ultimate reality, and there has been a wide variety of accounts of how to do this. One of the most powerful mystical traditions in Islamic philosophy is found in Ismaili thought, the sort of thought referred to in al-Ghazali's statement above as supporting *talim* (Nasir Khusraw 1998). The imam, the spiritual and intellectual guide of the community, is able to understand the meaning of the message of God, and communicates that meaning to his followers. There is no route to the real meaning of the message except through the imam; only he has access to the appropriate form of interpretation (*ta'wil*) which reveals its inner (*batin*) nature. Persian thinkers were often concerned to differentiate their approach to reality from Sufism; so, instead of calling their approach '*ilm al-tasawwuf*' (which would identify it too closely with Sufism), they sometimes used the expression '*ilm al-'irfan*', the science of gnosis. The Sufis came in for a great deal of criticism for their antinomian tendencies –that is, for the idea that once one knew how to experience ultimate reality, one did not need to obey the rules and regulations of public religion. It was also brought out that Sufism is supererogatory, it goes beyond what is necessary in religion, and as such may put people off the basic set of practices and beliefs, or even encourage them in alternative beliefs and practices (Leaman 1999).

### Check Your Progress III

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

1) How man is an integral part of Nature – Discuss.

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2) How are science and ethics philosophically correlated in Islam?

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3) Bring out the philosophical significance of mysticism in Islam.

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## 2.5 LET US SUM UP

Our discussion in this chapter has been concerned primarily with Islamic Philosophy. This discussion also took into consideration what the Greeks had comprehended in terms of philosophy. Philosophy is the knowledge of all existing things *qua* existents (*ashya'al-maujudah bi ma hiya maujudah*). Islamic philosophy, like everything else Islamic, is deeply rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith. Islamic philosophy is Islamic not only by virtue of the fact that it was cultivated in the Islamic world and by Muslims, but because it derives its principles, inspiration, and many of the questions with which it has been concerned, from the sources of Islamic revelation despite the claims of its opponents to the contrary. With this understanding we discussed Islamic philosophy under three aspects: Philosophy of God, Philosophy of the Human Person and the Philosophy of the World.

Speaking on the philosophy of God, Islam pronounced the Oneness of God (*tawhid*). This doctrine of Unity lies at the heart of Islamic philosophy. Despite debates, the Qur'anic doctrine of Unity so central to Islam, has remained dominant and in a sense has determined the agenda of the Islamic philosophy. It is also the Qur'anic doctrine of the creating God and *creation ex nihilo*, with all the different levels of meaning which *nihilo* possesses, "that led Islamic philosophers to distinguish sharply between God as a Pure Being and the existence of the universe is always contingent while God is necessary (*wajih al-wujud*). Under the philosophy of the Human Person we discussed that the human beings are vicegerents, only next to God. Man is given the gift to live in this world. He has reached such a stage of evolution that he has become fit for being gifted with the Divine spirit and supernatural values. Consequently, he has acquired the faculties of free will, knowledge, and responsibility. Man,

as in the Qur'an, despite his being an integral part of society is an independent being. His conduct is not determined by society and history alone, though he cannot be regarded as being apart from the society. While discussing the philosophy of the world, we brought out how God is integrated with human beings and nature. Islam is the name of the Divine system of the universe. The Book of Islam is "the recorded Qur'an (*al-Quran al-tadwini*)" and the entire universe is the "Qur'an of creation (*al-Qur'an al-takwini*)." Humanity is a Divine Book that corresponds to the Qur'an and the universe. Many Qur'anic verses designate how human life is so interrelated with natural phenomena that those who can discern them can draw absolutely correct conclusions about the world's future.

We summed up our discussion by stating that Islam is the universal order, the integral religion of harmony, and the unique system that harmonizes the physical with the metaphysical, the rational with the ideal, and the corporeal with the spiritual. Each dimension of our earthly life has its own place within Islam's matrix and thus can perform its own function, enable the human kind to be at peace with one self and community and nature, and gain happiness in both worlds.

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## 2.6 KEY WORDS

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<i>Aql-al-awwal</i>	: first intellect,
<i>aql-al-fa'al</i>	: active intellect
<i>ayat</i>	: signs, verses of the Quran
<i>dhat</i>	: essence
<i>dhikr</i>	: remembrance
<i>falsafa</i>	: philosophers, philosophy
<i>hadith</i>	: Tradition, report of something said by the Prophet or his companions,
<i>hikma</i>	: wisdom, philosophy
<i>khalifa</i>	: vicegerent, Sufism : Islamic Mysticism.

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