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William C. Chittick

The question I want to address is this: How can the resources of the Islamic intellectual tradition help us understand the role of political ideology in the modern world? This is not a topic that I would ordinarily deal with. I much prefer the sanity of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to the ideological madness of the modern world.

Let me begin by offering a rough definition of “ideology”: Ideology is any sort of sociopolitical program that is built upon analyses of human nature that are claimed to be rational and scientific. Ideology is derived from the humanistic and secular theories that grew up in the post-Christian West. By my definition, it is not correct to use the word to speak of traditional religion, that is, the pre-modern forms of religious thought, all of which are rooted not in secular, “rational” theories, but in revelation with its mythic and symbolic language.

Notice, however, that the various forms of politicized religious thinking, often lumped together in the category of “fundamentalism,” do in fact deserve to be called ideology, because they share many of the assumptions of the secular worldviews. Karen Armstrong has nicely summarized the modern origins of fundamentalism in her excellent book, *The Battle for God*. There she shows how Christian, Jewish, and Muslim fundamentalism share common assumptions about the world. Specifically she speaks of the manner in which fundamentalists appropriate the grand founding myths of their tradition, reject the heritage of interpretation passed down through the ages, and reinterpret the myths in rationalistic terms that are devoid of any sense of symbolism and beauty. Fundamentalists seize upon the grand symbolic narratives

that address the whole realm of human concerns and transform them into supposedly rational and scientific programs to alter the face of human society. It is no accident that so many of the prominent fundamentalist thinkers were originally trained as engineers.

In order to provide a focus for my discussion, I want to discuss three important goals of the Islamic intellectual tradition and suggest how these goals transcend ideology and can aid us in seeing the limitations of ideological thinking. These goals are overcoming dogmatism, asserting the absoluteness of the truly Real, and preserving the mythic imagination.

The Intellectual Tradition

By “the intellectual tradition,” I mean those branches of Islamic knowledge that were focused on transforming the self, actualizing intelligence, seeing things as they truly are, and acting appropriately. Historically these goals are most clearly expressed in Islamic philosophy and certain forms of Sufism. In order to understand the role of this tradition, we need to keep in mind the basic difference between intellectual and transmitted knowledge. Intellectual knowledge can only be discovered within oneself in the very nature of intelligence. Transmitted knowledge is received from others.

In any field of transmitted learning, experts have several important concerns, such as organizing and interpreting the knowledge and shoring up the reputation of those from whom knowledge is transmitted, the “authorities.” In the Islamic context, attempts to prove the reliability of transmitted knowledge are obvious in many of the activities of the theologians and jurists. But the same need is present in all forms of transmitted knowledge, whether religious or secular. Nowadays, for example, people love to claim that their knowledge is “scientific.” Thereby, they call upon the authority of the great teachers of our own culture. Science, however, is by no means anything other than transmitted knowledge, despite its connection with certain intellectual principles. If we believe in what are called scientific facts, we do so because the great scientists say that they are so, not because we have discovered them for ourselves and in ourselves.

It should be obvious that the basic transmitted knowledge of any culture goes unquestioned. People receive their knowledge

as part and parcel of their language, their customs, their techniques, their artifacts, and everything they take as “normal.” Such transmitted knowledge is never simply “religious.” It may just as well be “scientific” or “political” or “historical.” If people are sure about something, it is typically because the knowledge goes unquestioned in their trusted circles. In their view, “Everybody knows that.” We do not normally question the authority of those who establish the very structure of our categories and the habitual patterns of our thinking. Transmitted knowledge is woven into the fabric of our worldview, whatever that worldview may be.

Transmitted knowledge, then, is the type of knowledge that dominates over human culture, and modern culture is by no means an exception. Whenever we imagine that we know something, we have heard it from others. Nor can we claim that our own personal knowledge qualifies as intellectual, because we have received it from our sense organs, which are notoriously unreliable.

In contexts where the authority of transmitted knowledge was sustained primarily by religious belief, there were relatively few sources of reliable knowledge, so there were relatively few categories of authoritative teachers. Nowadays, various systems of knowledge compete with each other, and each has a chain of transmission going back to the founding fathers. There is an enormous proliferation of privileged classes claiming to represent authoritative knowledge—scientists, engineers, doctors, psychiatrists, lawyers, physicists, neurosurgeons, Orientalists—the list is endless. No matter what you want to say about the reliability of such knowledge, for you and me it is transmitted. What gives us confidence in it—if we have any—is that we trust the authority of the source.

If transmitted knowledge is our ordinary, everyday sort of knowledge, intellectual knowledge is something quite different. Knowledge only qualifies as intellectual when knowers know it at the very root of their own intelligence and without any intermediary—not even imagination and cogitation. In the terminology of Islamic philosophy, this sort of knowledge was sometimes called “non-instrumental” (*ghayr âlî*), because it does not depend upon any means of perception or apprehension. In other words, it does not come to us from outside ourselves, nor does it derive from sense perception (*hiss*), imagination (*khayâl*), or intuition (*wahm*). Rather, it wells up from the deepest realm of human in-

telligence, which is nothing but the divine spirit that was blown into the clay of Adam.

In short, the role of “intellectual tradition” in the broad sense of the term was to make firsthand knowledge available to those who wanted it. It was to show people the way to move beyond what they have heard and what they have been told by their society and their teachers. It was a path to discover the ultimate truths of the universe within the depths of one’s own intelligence, the only place where truth can be found.

This was the object of the quest. How many people reached it? Most likely very few. The point is, however, that this quest has remained an ideal in Islamic society.

Dogmatic Thinking

Let me now turn to the first of the goals of the intellectual tradition mentioned earlier—overcoming dogmatism. By “dogmatism” I mean the claim put forth by authoritative teachers or thinkers or ideologues that everyone must adhere to a certain set of beliefs and practices. Dogmatism is a fact of life in all societies. In Islamic society, the dogmatists were jurists and theologians who claimed that all truth had been revealed in the Koran and that their own interpretation of that truth had to be accepted by everyone. In modern society, dogmatism is found among believers of all sorts—believers in religion, especially fundamentalists, and believers in science, medicine, technology, ideology, progress, and so on.

Many historians have remarked on a certain dogmatic closure that gradually occurred in Islamic society, especially with the shaping of the juridical and theological schools. This closure certainly had various negative consequences, but we need to remember that the theologians and jurists, however narrow their perspective may have been, played the necessary role of preserving the transmitted knowledge upon which the religion depends for its survival. Moreover, when and if the theologian-jurists brought about dogmatic closure, they did so only in the sphere of transmitted knowledge, not in intellectual knowledge. Catechisms and polemics cannot hold people back from striving to achieve first-hand knowledge of God, the world, and their own souls. The deeply rooted quest for wisdom that is innate to the human spirit cannot be blocked by rhetoric and threats. Certainly, it remained an open path in Islamic civilization. With the rise of sci-

ence and secularism in the West, however, the quest for wisdom was largely debunked, and people began talking about the death of God and the death of metaphysics that goes along with it.

Al-Ghazâlî among others frequently attacks the dogmatic mentality. In doing so he differentiates between true, intellectual knowledge and knowledge received by transmission. Received knowledge too often becomes a veil that prevents real knowledge. In one passage he writes,

The cause of the veil is that someone will learn the creed of the Sunnis and he will learn the proofs for that as they are uttered in dialectics and debate. Then he will give his whole heart over to this and believe that there is no knowledge whatsoever beyond it. If something else enters his heart, he will say, "This disagrees with what I have heard, and whatever disagrees with it is false." It is impossible for someone like this ever to know the truth of affairs, for the belief learned by the common people is the mold of the truth, not the truth itself. Complete knowledge is for the realities to be unveiled from within the mold, like a kernel from the shell.¹

How then does one break the shell of dogmatic thinking that rules over human society? A good way to address this question is to look at the concept of *tahqîq*, "verification" or "realization," a word that was used to designate the goal of the intellectual quest. The basic meaning of the word is to find the truth for oneself. It derives from the same root as *haqq* and *haqîqa*, both of which mean truth and reality. The word *haqq* also signifies rightness, appropriateness, worthiness, duty, and responsibility.

In Koranic usage, *haqq* sometimes carries a sense similar to our modern concept of "right," and nowadays its plural, *huqûq*, is commonly used in talk of "human rights." It is often forgotten however, that the Arabic word also carries the sense of English "responsibility." It is impossible to disengage rights from responsibilities in the pre-modern discourse of Islamic civilization. Moreover, both rights and responsibilities are rooted in the Absolute *Haqq* that is God.

As employed in the philosophical texts, *tahqîq* typically means to search out and find for oneself the *haqq* of things—their truth and reality—and then to act rightly and appropriately. The

1 *Kîmiyâ-yi sa'âdat*, edited by H. Khadîw-jam, Tehran: Jîbî, 1354/1975, 36-37.

opposite of *tahqîq* is *taqlîd* or “imitation,” a word that is well-known in the writings of contemporary Muslim thinkers, not least because so many of them have condemned it. But their condemnation has to do with the meaning of *taqlîd* in the transmitted sciences, not the intellectual sciences. In jurisprudence, *taqlîd* is the opposite of *ijtihâd*, not *tahqîq*. It means to follow someone’s authority in legal matters. The issue in discussions of *taqlîd* and *ijtihâd* always remains the interpretation of legal, social, and political teachings. How this interpretation should be done remains vital to Islamic society.

In talking about *taqlîd* in the legal sense, we need to remember that such *taqlîd* was the norm for all Muslims who wanted to practice their religion in the way set down by the Koran and the Hadith. In other words, it was the norm in all issues pertaining to transmitted knowledge. Even those who were engaged in a quest for intellectual knowledge took their transmitted knowledge by way of imitation. There is no way to practice a tradition other than to receive instructions from others and to imitate the models provided by past generations.

As for *ijtihâd*, it played an important role when new situations called for finding the proper Islamic way of dealing with things. But *ijtihâd* is itself based upon *taqlîd*, because the raw material of *ijtihâd* has been transmitted and accepted from previous generations.

It is worth keeping in mind that the modern-day critics of *taqlîd* are not criticizing *taqlîd* in all knowledge, because they themselves have received their knowledge of the Islamic tradition and Islamic history from others. What they are attacking is first the authority of those whose interpretation of legal teachings has come to be accepted. They are asking believers to stop imitating the old authorities and to start imitating the new authorities, who often seem to be the critics themselves. Second, they attack the reliability of the knowledge that has traditionally been imitated. Most of them tell us that Islamic teachings need to be adapted to the times. In other words, there are new forms of authoritative, transmitted knowledge that must now be imitated. There are new classes of theologians and jurists—now known as scientists, psychologists, biologists, sociologists, and critical theorists. These new authorities must be followed along with or instead of the old authorities.

But there is a rather striking difference between the old-style and new-style ulama. As al-Ghazâlî pointed out, the transmitted knowledge of theology and jurisprudence is a shell, and inside the shell is the kernel of true knowledge and wisdom, because the nut has grown on the tree of revelation, which is itself the manifestation of divine wisdom. To get to the kernel, one needs to break the shell. In the new-style knowledge, one may indeed break the shell, but what sort of kernel are we then expected to eat? Who would claim that modern knowledge is rooted in wisdom?

Coming back to the intellectual tradition, we need to understand that *taqlîd* was condemned in intellectual knowledge, not *taqlîd* in transmitted knowledge. Moreover, at the early stages of the quest for intellectual knowledge, one must imitate those who have achieved it, so *taqlîd* is in fact a necessity. But the goal was always kept in view, and that was to achieve *tahqîq*, which is knowing the truth of things for oneself and in oneself, not by means of hearsay.

One more point may help clarify why distinguishing between intellectual and transmitted knowledge was considered important. As human beings, we need both kinds of knowledge, but it is important to know which sort of knowledge is appropriate for which domain. Muslim intellectuals maintained that in matters pertaining to the real nature of things—that is, in knowledge of God, the cosmos, and the human self—one should seek to know for oneself, but in matters pertaining to social, legal, and other secondary affairs, it was appropriate to follow the guidelines of transmitted knowledge. In other words, they insisted that one must know reality for oneself, but it was appropriate to draw from the knowledge transmitted from the prophets and sages to deal with the situation correctly.

Our modern view of things is rather different. We seem to think—or at least we act as if we think—that we should accept as given the popular consensus on the nature of the world, a consensus that has been established by scientists, scholars, and the media, because we ourselves do not have the expertise. At the same time, we feel relatively free to be “creative,” not by making contact with the source of creativity, which is the pure intelligence of the divine breath, but rather by rebelling against the transmitted knowledge that forms the basis of law, religion, social order, and human relations.

The intellectual tradition makes a great deal of the fact that the word *tahqîq* derives from the word *haqq*, the primary meaning of which is God as absolute Reality and transcendent Truth. The Muslim philosophers often employed *haqq* in this sense along with the adjective *awwal*, “first.” For them, *al-Haqq al-awwal*—“the First Truth” or “the First Reality”—was the very Selfhood of God. They held that no proper, worthy, and true elucidation of anything is possible without the prior elucidation of how things are related to *al-Haqq al-awwal*.

In short, the word *tahqîq* does not simply mean to know the truth for oneself. It also means to know the First Truth and Absolute Reality and then to act appropriately. This First Truth delineates *huqûq*—rights, duties, and responsibilities—by its very nature. In order to understand and act in keeping with the *huqûq*, one must conform to *al-Haqq al-awwal*. *Tahqîq* thus embraces both the cognitive act of knowing the Absolute Truth and the ethical responsibilities that follow upon this act.

Lest I be misunderstood, I need to insist that the inadequacy of *taqlîd* in intellectual knowledge does not preclude the fact of its necessity in everyday life and especially in affairs of religious practice. No one can invent practices that will bring about nearness to God. The revealed law (*shari`a*) is precisely the path to God that has been revealed to the prophets. The Muslim philosophers acknowledged that religious rites and duties have been transmitted from the prophets, and more specifically from the Prophet of Islam. They were practicing Muslims, after all—even if they shared various philosophical tenets and viewpoints with Greeks, Christians, and Jews. Their religious practices, like those of other Muslims, were based on *taqlîd* of the Prophet, even if they sometimes heaped ridicule on the theologians and jurists, who claimed to have absolute authority in religious matters.

Asserting Absoluteness

If the first role of intelligence is to overcome dogmatic thinking by breaking the shell, finding the kernel, and knowing the True Reality for oneself, its second role is to assert the absoluteness of *al-Haqq al-awwal*. This means to see God and all things in the light of *tawhîd*, the assertion of unity. *Tawhîd* is the founding thesis of Islamic faith and the underlying axiom of the intellectual tradition. In philosophical writing the fact of *tawhîd* is

taken for granted. Philosophers do indeed offer proofs for it, but not to convince themselves, rather to awaken the intelligence of students and seekers and to work out its implications for various domains.

The methodology of *tahqîq*—of perceiving *al-Haqq al-awwal* and drawing its consequences—assumes that human intelligence is adequate to the Absolute Reality, and that this Absolute Reality is one. The truth and reality of God and the universe—their *haqq*—can be known; the rights of God, people, and other creatures—their *huqûq*—can be discerned; and the appropriate and worthy response to truth and right can be put into practice.

By saying that “human intelligence is adequate to Absolute Reality,” I do not mean to imply that the practitioners of *tahqîq* ignored the insights provided by revelation in general and the Koran in particular. Certainly some theologians and jurists accused philosophers of denying the prophets and Sufis of claiming to be greater than the prophets. The basic reason for these sorts of criticism is obvious: The self-appointed defenders of the tradition tried to impose dogmatic closure on all believers, but both philosophers and Sufis wanted to know for themselves. They refused to rely on knowledge received by hearsay, even if religious and social conventions maintained that the knowledge was true and reliable.

We must not forget that revelation addresses both intellectual and transmitted knowledge. The two domains are already highlighted in the Shahadah, the profession of faith—“There is no god but God” and “Muhammad is the messenger of God.”

Tawhîd, the starting point of intellectual knowledge, is enunciated in the first half of the Shahadah and does not depend upon transmitted learning. In contrast, the details of belief and practice brought by Muhammad depend upon transmission of the Koran and the Sunnah.

The fundamental Islamic view of *tawhîd* is that it is universal and ahistorical. It is the core message of all 124,000 prophets. The function of the prophets is to remind people of their own innate intuition of *tawhîd* and to guide them in applying *tawhîd* to personal and social circumstances. The details of the guidance differ in keeping with what the Koran calls “the language of the people” to whom the prophets deliver the messages.

Although the second half of the Shahadah pertains to specific historical circumstances and can be known only by way of trans-

mission, there remain pertinent questions concerning the nature of prophecy and revelation that transcend history and were considered accessible to intelligence without transmission. For example, what sort of human being is designated by the words prophet and *messenger*? Why should the authority of such a person be accepted? What is the difference between prophetic knowledge and merely human knowledge? What is the relationship between prophetic knowledge and ultimate human happiness?

For some of the theologians and jurists, the very fact of asking such questions could be a sign of unbelief. But the philosophers saw clearly that one cannot prove the authority of the Koran simply by calling on the authority of the Koran. If we are talking about knowledge and not simply belief, then one must prove—without recourse to authority—that the Koran has authority. In order to do so, one must establish a necessary role for prophets in human history. If such a necessary role exists, it must pertain to human nature. It follows that the role's necessity must be discoverable without transmission. Actual transmission can come into play once it has been accepted that transmitted knowledge plays an important or necessary role. At that point, one can take full and confident advantage of transmitted knowledge.

In short, the theologians and jurists were the bastions of transmitted knowledge. Their authority derived from the principle “Muhammad is the messenger of God.” Their primary concern was to define proper beliefs and practices on the basis of transmitted knowledge. In contrast, the philosophers and many of the Sufis were seekers of intellectual knowledge. Their role in society derived from the self-evident truth of the principle “There is no god but God.” Their primary concern was to draw the implications of *tawhîd* for all realms to which it applies—that is, to the whole of reality as it actually is, without regard to what may or may not have happened in the past. Hence they focused on three basic and interrelated realms of understanding—metaphysics, cosmology, and spiritual psychology, that is, the study of the human self.

From the standpoint of the intellectual tradition, there is no antagonism between intellectual and transmitted knowledge. One can perfectly well discover the truth of things for oneself and at the same time recognize the necessity of transmitted knowledge. The standpoint of transmitted knowledge is quite different, however. If we reject the possibility of intellectual knowledge, we are

forced to cling to what al-Ghazâlî called the “shell” of knowledge. The result will always be dogmatic closure. Without understanding that the primary truths must be known for oneself and in oneself, we will choose to imitate others and accept hearsay as the basis for belief and action.

It should be obvious that today we live in a world that for the most part considers intellectual knowledge in the way that I have been describing it as an absurdity or an impossibility. As a result, there is always a feverish search for reliable transmitted knowledge, and this helps explain the mythic aura surrounding scientific discoveries. People now believe that science alone is qualified to discover the secrets of the universe, and, not only that, but they accept the discoveries as reliable truth, not realizing that thereby they are asserting their belief in transmitted knowledge and surrendering their intellectual autonomy.

Ideology addresses this same human hunger to know the truth of things. It is never more than a simplistic and “scientific” program for providing happiness to the human race. Those who propose the grand programs of progress and well-being are simply telling us to replace one sort of authoritative transmitted knowledge with another. In the Islamic world, the new transmitted knowledge of the modern Islamist movements replaces the transcendent, ahistorical hope in God and salvation of the pre-modern tradition with impossible dreams of a perfect human society. Thus, we see

the triumph of a social imaginary that is termed “Islamic” but that in fact sacralizes an irreversible operation of political, economic, social, and cultural secularization. . . . [Islam has been turned into] an instrument of disguising behaviors, institutions, and cultural and scientific activities inspired by the very Western model that has been ideologically rejected.²

Mythic Imagination

If two of the roles of intelligence are to overcome dogma and to affirm *tawhîd*, a third role is to recognize the proper place of myth in human understanding and, if necessary, to revitalize mythic discourse. The Enlightenment succeeded in establishing

2 Muhammad Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, translated by Robert D. Lee, Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, 13.

the supremacy of instrumental rationality. In doing so, it negated the cognitive significance of the myths and symbols that characterize scripture and much of religious discourse. The realms to which myth and symbol refer—God, the angels, the resurrection, human perfection—were understood as being unintelligible and meaningless, because they could not be addressed by the empirical methodologies of instrumental reason.

On the Islamic side, both theology and jurisprudence tended to ignore the symbolic content of the religious teachings. Jurisprudence was interesting in providing guidelines for human behavior, and theology wanted to defend rational dogmas derived from the mythic picture of God found in the Koran. In contrast, both philosophy and Sufism looked at the meaning to which the signs of the Koran were pointing. They understood that mythic language opens up the soul to God and the transcendent meaning of things.

Modern scholarship has gone a long way toward rediscovering the role of myth and symbol in pre-modern civilizations and cultures. But modernity in general lacks the resources for understanding the real significance of what was going on. This is because it has failed to come up with a proper metaphysics, cosmology, and spiritual psychology. By “proper” I mean “dealing with the *haqq* of things,” not simply with things as they are described in the transmitted learning of a secular, ideological, and scientific age. The academic sciences of modernity have in fact been constrained by the dogmatism of transmitted sciences like physics, biology, psychology, and sociology, and, as a result, theorists have placed arbitrary constraints on objective reality and human possibility.

The real danger of instrumental rationality lies in the absolutizing claims made by its supporters. Instrumental rationality must play a certain role in any society, but when it plays the dominant role, the traditional teachings about human nature are necessarily obscured. Scientific knowledge itself takes the place of myth and symbol in providing the grand narratives of human life. This is one of the aspects of scientism, the dogmatic view that real knowledge is provided by modern science alone. Scientism pervades the modern imagination, so much so that most people—religious people included—simply take its assumptions and worldview for granted. Scientism is a rationalizing ideology

that has all the persuasive powers of technology, education, and the media to back it up. It provides the de facto theology for the civil religion of modernity. The many contemporary thinkers who criticize scientism have no effect on the thinking and preaching of our own home-grown theologians and jurists—the scientists, technocrats, and ideologues who have long since established a new set of myths and symbols to drive the modern world.

Because of the prevalence of scientism, few people have any sense of the full-bodied truth and total coherence of pre-modern worldviews, which established delicate balances between mythic imagination and rational inquiry. In the Islamic context, no one has analyzed this balance with more subtlety than the enormously influential thirteenth-century jurist, theologian, philosopher, and Sufi, Ibn `Arabî. Let me summarize what he has to say on this vital issue:

In order to deal with the nature of things, says Ibn `Arabî, we must see myth and reason as coexisting harmoniously. *Al-Haqq al-awwal*, the First Reality, necessarily appears dichotomously to contingent beings. God is both creator and destroyer, both merciful and wrathful. Any analysis of the divine attributes shows that they must be understood both positively and negatively, both in terms of transcendence and in terms of immanence. The reason for this is simply that in itself, *al-Haqq al-awwal* is both absent from all things and present with everything.

Human beings have a unique relationship with both God and the cosmos. They have the ability to grasp, understand, and realize God in both his distance and his nearness. Ibn `Arabî calls the faculty of seeing God as absent and distant *`aql*, “reason,” and he calls the faculty of seeing God as near and present *khayâl*, “imagination.” What I have been calling “intelligence,” Ibn `Arabî calls “the heart” (*qalb*). This important Koranic term designates the synthetic, spiritual core of the human being.

If the heart is to gain the capacity of perceiving the Word of God resounding in itself, and if it is to intensify its own spiritual instinct, it must open what its “two eyes”—the eye of reason and the eye of imagination, or discursive thought and mythic vision. Only the fully realized heart can grasp the symbolic significance of revelation, because neither reason nor imagination working on its own can see the fullness of the *huqûq*—the truths, realities, rights, and responsibilities—established by *al-Haqq al-awwal*.

In Ibn `Arabî's reading of the Islamic tradition, the eye of reason, characteristic of the theologians and jurists, is inadequate because it sees God only as transcendent. It recognizes that God in himself cannot be known, so he needs to be described as absolutely apart from every created thing and every quality. Left to its own devices, reason will reject the messages of the prophets—which are primarily anthropomorphic and mythic—and refuse to acknowledge that anything positive can be said about God. Excessive stress upon rational thought pushes the divine into absolute transcendence. When this process is not kept in balance by the eye of myth and imagination, rational analysis will eventually make “the hypothesis of God” extraneous to rigorous, critical thinking. We see this process taking place in the mainstream development of Western thought. The end result was a scientific rationality completely oblivious to the *huqûq* of God, the world, and the human soul. In other words, excessive dependence upon reason leads to agnosticism and atheism.

For its part, the eye of imagination is inadequate because it sees God as immanent. It recognizes God's signs and marks in all things. It perceives the universe as the theatre of divine significance, infused with intelligent and intelligible light. It finds God's names and attributes manifest everywhere in the world and the soul, and it describes God in the positive terms supplied by revelation and the natural realm. In other words, the eye of imagination feeds on myth and symbol, and it sees things not simply as signs and pointers to God, but as the actual presence of *al-Haqq al-awwal*. However, left to its own devices, imagination will ascribe divinity to the world and its productions.

In Ibn `Arabî's view, the heart is the unitary awareness at the root of the human self. It is identical with the divine spirit that God blew into the clay of Adam, but it needs to be recovered, cultivated, and actualized. The goal of *tahqîq* is to find the *haqq* of the heart, the *haqq* of God, and the *haqq* of creatures, and then to act according to all these *haqq*s. No *tahqîq* is possible unless one sees with both eyes, recognizing God in both his transcendence and his immanence, both his absoluteness and his infinity.

The heart, which is no different from realized intelligence, must use the critical powers of reason to prevent associating other gods with God, or to avoid turning relative things into absolutes (the sin of *shirk*). But, if intelligence needs to employ reason cor-

rectly, it also needs to employ imagination correctly. It must undertake the mythic task of seeing everything as a sign and symbol of the divine. It must behold every creature as a “face” (*wajh*) of God and recognize that everything in the universe has a *haqq* bestowed upon it by its Creator. It must keep the symbolic significance of things alive and respond properly to the living presence of God in all creatures. Only this attitude can allow people to respect the rights not only of God and of other human beings, but also of the natural realm. When people fail to see the divine face wherever they look, they fall either into the one-sided transcendentalism that is characteristic of religious fundamentalism or the atheism and agnosticism that are characteristic of secular and scientific fundamentalism.

A Final Word

If the Islamic intellectual tradition has any help to offer to the modern predicament, it seems to me that it is the call to recover *for ourselves*—each of us individually—a proper understanding of our own nature. Otherwise, dogmatism and ideology cannot be avoided. The fundamental insight of the intellectual tradition is that in order to know the proper way of acting in the world and living out our human embodiment, we must know what the world signifies to us. In order to know the significance of things, we must know our own nature and our own proper destiny. In order to know our own nature, we must know the self that knows.

One point that is typically forgotten in discussions of who we are is that we cannot know the knowing self as object, only as subject. We cannot truly know ourselves except when object and subject are indistinguishable. The unity of knower and known, of self and world, of man and God, is the ultimate insight of *tawhîd*. It is this alone that gives human beings the ability to see things as they truly are, to recognize the *haqq* of God, of people, and of things, and to act properly in response to the rights of God and the rights of man.

Offering a critique of dogmatism and ideology is a necessary first step in recovering a proper understanding of human nature. But proper understanding demands recognizing that the human self is grounded in an impersonal and trans-historical intelligence and ultimately in Absolute Reality. As long as scientists and scholars persist in ignoring the fact that intelligence cannot know

the *haqq* of things by standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before, there can be no escape from dogmatism, which by nature is grounded in *taqlîd* and turns transmitted information into absolutes. Until it is recognized that the only dependable and real knowledge is awareness of the First Real, *al-Haqq al-awwal*, there will be no escape from an ever more polarized world of ideological conflict.