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The Current State of Islamic Philosophy:

Between Renewal and the Preservation of Fundamentals

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Abstract:

Islamic philosophy—traditionally referred to as Islamic wisdom (Hikmah)—strives to restore the efficacy of the Muslim intellect and revitalize the role of Islamic civilization. This objective is pursued through the dedicated efforts of its thinkers, who aim to advance not only the Arab-Islamic nation but also diverse nations and societies globally. Central to this endeavor is the attempt to establish the foundational principles of *Aymanah* (a faith-based ethical paradigm) as an alternative, renewing project for Islamic knowledge and sciences in the contemporary era. By doing so, it seeks to resume and reconnect with the illustrious epochs of Islamic history. Consequently, this article aims to explore the contemporary relevance of Islamic philosophy and the potential contributions it has to offer.

Keywords: Islamic Philosophy, Islamic Theology, Islamic Studies, Modernity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

By the end of the fourteenth century CE and the beginning of the fifteenth century, the role of Islamic civilization declined. This civilization had illuminated the corners of the globe through a fruitful monotheistic stewardship (Istikhlaf) for humanity, offering diverse Islamic knowledge and sciences across multiple fields. It started from the city of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), which nurtured exceptional figures, luminaries, and sages who advanced divine sciences that established the glory and sovereignty of this Ummah, as well as human salvation in both this world and the hereafter. Subsequently, knowledge and sciences spread across various Islamic metropolises, such as the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah) in Baghdad. Later, Cordoba emerged as a gathering place for the world's scholars, serving as a beacon of light radiating over Europe, which was then steeped in the darkness of the Middle Ages, thereby propelling its renaissance and laying the foundations for philosophy and modern sciences, such as psychology and sociology.

We firmly believe that the Islamic mind is capable of resuming the contributions and brilliance of Islamic civilization. This is due to its abundant, renewable cognitive potentials and energies, which can establish an Islamic civilizational, scientific, and epistemological alternative in a contemporary world dominated by a Western instrumental reason. This instrumental reason, born out of the projects of modernity and postmodernity, has largely depleted human energy. There is no clearer evidence of this than the successive axiological, ecological, and biological crises threatening human existence on Earth.

Islamic philosophy, or Islamic wisdom (Hikmah), seeks to restore the efficacy of the Muslim mind and the role of Islamic civilization. This is achieved through the endeavors of its thinkers to elevate the Arab-Islamic Ummah, as well as other nations and societies, by attempting to establish "Aymanah" (a faith-based paradigm) as a renewed alternative project for Islamic knowledge and sciences in our current era, thereby reconnecting with and resuming the various luminous periods in the history of Islamic civilization.

Proceeding from the postulate that Islamic philosophy can regain its vitality through its wealth of rich ideas, we arrive at the primary objective of this research:

restoring the intellectual brilliance of Islamic civilization and its distinguished role among the nations and peoples of the world. The rationale for selecting this topic stems from both subjective and objective reasons. Subjectively, it is driven by our profound passion for Islamic wisdom and our dedication to scholarly research within its sanctuaries. Objectively, it is based on the fact that Islamic philosophy has offered, and will continue to offer, numerous sophisticated ideas to various nations and peoples. The core problematic of our research is: How can Islamic philosophy contribute to the advancement of nations and societies? This branches into several sub-questions: What is meant by Islamic philosophy or Islamic wisdom? What are the main fields constituting Islamic philosophy? How can the current state of Islamic philosophy be characterized today? And what is the future role of Islamic philosophy in revitalizing human civilization? We have adopted both analytical and historical methodologies by attempting to analyze some of the most significant ideas inherent in Islamic philosophy and reflecting on its historical trajectory, in the hope of attaining comprehensive answers to our proposed problematic.

1) On the Essence of Islamic Philosophy

Philosophy in general, a word of Greek origin, means the love of wisdom. It is composed of two Greek words: "Philo," meaning love, and "Sophia," meaning wisdom (محمد ، 2010، صفحة 07). In the Arabic language, the word "Hikmah" (wisdom) "denotes what is true in reality according to human capacity; it is also said that any speech aligning with the truth is wisdom" (الجرجاني ، 2004، صفحة 81). Hence, wisdom in Arabic refers to sound reasoning, correct judgment, and the ability to act appropriately in the face of complex matters and ambiguous problems (محمد, 2010, p. 07).

Among the references to wisdom in the Holy Quran is the Almighty's saying in (Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 269): ﴿He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good. And none will remember except those of understanding﴾.

Philosophy is that type of thinking "which seeks the truth in understanding the universe, life, humanity, and destinies. Some Greeks considered themselves sages, i.e., philosophers, because they were concerned with knowing these matters" (محمد, 2010, p. 08).

As for the definition of Islamic philosophy, a heated debate has emerged between two prominent perspectives. The first is represented by certain Orientalists and their followers, whose viewpoint is summarized as follows: "The philosophical heritage of Muslims only began in tandem with the translation movement, through which most Greek philosophical books were translated into Arabic, particularly during the Abbasid era" (مصطفى ، 1998، صفحة 83). However, an objective researcher examining this view and its implications finds its danger lies in restricting Islamic philosophy solely to Muslim philosophers who followed and developed the Greek philosophical heritage. Conversely, proponents of the second, civilizationally-oriented perspective believe in the necessity of "expanding the concept of Islamic philosophy to encompass all the intellectual output of Muslims, whether in the fields of 'Ilm al-Kalam' (Islamic scholastic theology), 'Philosophy,' or 'Sufism' (Islamic mysticism), and sometimes they even include 'Usul al-Fiqh' (Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence) within the sphere of Islamic philosophy" (مصطفى, 1998, p. 86). In truth, this perspective holds significant validity and importance, as it negates the absolute dependence of Muslims on Greek philosophy. The Mutakallimun (theologians) and Usuliyyun (scholars of jurisprudence principles) predated the philosophers; thus, rational debates commenced prior to the translation era. The intellectual environment generated by the advent of Islam, the Arabs' faith in it, and their correct understanding of its call for rational contemplation contributed to the emergence of wisdom or philosophy among Muslims. The role of the translation movement and the exposure to the philosophies of Greece, Persia, India, and other nations and civilizations preceding the Arab-Islamic civilization remains a secondary, stimulating, and catalytic role for the philosophical movement in the Islamic world (مصطفى, 1998, p. 84).

2) The Current State of Islamic Philosophy

Our discussion regarding the current state of Islamic philosophy or wisdom takes place in the context of an Islamic civilizational decline in the face of a superior and dominant Western civilization. Consequently, it is imperative to renew Islamic philosophy, and indeed all other Islamic sciences, in a manner that situates us within our contemporary era and propels us toward civilizational creativity. As Hassan Hanafi observes, feeling or sensing a matter is the first stage of knowledge (حنفي ، 2016، صفحة 239).

2.1) Renewal in Islamic Scholastic Theology (Ilm al-Kalam):

This topic, in reality, requires in-depth research; therefore, we will limit ourselves to providing descriptive fragments of the concept of renewal in one of the most important fields of Islamic philosophy or wisdom—namely, Islamic scholastic theology (Ilm al-Kalam). Shibli Nomani (1857–1914 CE) is considered one of the first scholars to focus on the renewal of Ilm al-Kalam. He argued that classical Kalam was focused on investigating Islamic dogmas because the objections of Islam's opponents at that time pertained to creed. However, at present, the task of Ilm al-Kalam lies in exploring the historical, civilizational, and ethical dimensions of religion (شبلي ، 2012، صفحة 181). Renewal in the issues addressed by theologians implies the generation of new questions as a result of modern doubts raised by Western civilization, whose core is controlled by global Zionism. As for the renewal of purpose, it entails moving beyond the traditional goals of this science—primarily defending Islamic beliefs—toward a profound analysis of the reality of faith and the entirety of the religious experience (الرفاعي ، 2016، صفحة 43). This necessitates renewing the tools of approach and theorization, and elevating their operational level and persuasive power (طه ، 2000، صفحة 158).

2.2) Renewal in the Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence (Usul al-Fiqh):

The science of Usul al-Fiqh is considered one of the most noble Islamic sciences, and thus it is not isolated from renewal. It is no surprise that renewal is an absolute necessity and a universal law, required in all things. It does not mean that "we discard the old, or demolish it and replace it with novel inventions, for this is not renewal but rather dissipation. Instead, what is intended is preserving the old, restoring what has worn out, and introducing improvements to it... Were it not for this, it would not be called 'renewal' (Tajdid), because renewal only applies to something old" (وصفي ، 2009، صفحة 09). Thus, renewal does not contradict authenticity; rather, it is a manifestation of authenticity and a (السريري، 2016، صفحة 199) crucial factor in preserving and enriching it. It means safeguarding the essence of the old while welcoming any new element that does not conflict with the heritage (وصفي, 2009, p. 10). One might argue: "This is not renewal at all; true renewal requires that the old form of Usul al-Fiqh be changed, not merely repeated alongside the new, as the desired outcome is an innovatively structured science of Usul al-Fiqh" (طه ، سؤال المنهج في أفق التأسيس لأنموذج فكري جديد، 2015، صفحة 270). In truth, such a statement is made by those who have turned their backs on mastering rational tools, becoming preoccupied with the contents of rational texts rather than their methodologies. Usul al-Fiqh is considered an instrumental science (Ulum al-Alah),

akin to logic and grammar. Consequently, their proper understanding of these contents has been corrupted, and they have missed the underlying reasons for creating the equivalent of this heritage in depth and creativity. As Taha Abderrahmane states: "The advancement of instrumental sciences... represented by a renewed interest in the science of Usul, will be beneficial in shifting Islamic scientific research from being closed off within the mere contents of texts to being open to the methods of creating, developing, and communicating these contents. That is, it is useful in grounding content-based research upon instrumental research. Upon reaching this objective, we will have found the correct path taken by our creative predecessors, and taken by anyone whose ambition is tied to Ijtihad (independent reasoning) and renewal" (السريري, 2016, p. 204).

In summary, the renewal of Islamic scholastic theology (or the principles of religion) and the renewal of Usul al-Fiqh require that these two sciences be sought amidst the obscurity of tribulations and the darkness of obfuscations, so that they may be recognized by their intrinsic characteristics and descriptions. They are capable of resurrecting a nation that is intellectually fortified, sharply intelligent, and fully aware of its objectives and ultimate goals (السريري, 2016, p. 204).

3) Features of Renewal in the Science of Islamic Sufism:

The project of renewing Sufi thought derives its epistemological importance from several motives. Perhaps the most significant is the Islamic Ummah's need for spiritual/gnostic (Irfani) education in an era marked by the exacerbation of extreme materialism and abhorrent individualistic tendencies of Western civilizational origin, which disregard the values of our Islamic Ummah that are inherently humanistic in essence and principle, Renewal in the science of Islamic Sufism means elevating it to a state where it can epistemologically surpass Western psychology, with which it intersects in subject matter.

Psychology and Sufism share almost the same subject matter: the human soul (Nafs). Indeed, some thinkers consider Sufism to be psychology itself, or the science of the soul's afflictions. Seyyed Hossein Nasr states: Regarding psychology, it is worth noting that Sufism contains a comprehensive method for curing the diseases of the soul. The spirit alone can know the soul and illuminate its dark corners and profound depths, Only the individual whose soul has attained integration and enlightenment possesses the right and the means to heal the souls of others, Islamic Sufi psychology focuses on the spirit and essence more than the

material aspects that dominate the conscience of Western psychology. We mention to the esteemed reader the fundamental elements of Islamic Sufi psychology: the self or soul (Nafs) as an aspect of the spirit; the heart (Qalb)—not referring to the physical organ that pumps blood, but the spiritual heart as the repository of knowledge and wisdom; the spirit (Ruh) in its direct connection with God Almighty; and happiness (Sa'adah), which is the pursuit of every human being.

4) Toward a Renewed Islamic Philosophical or Sapiential Creativity:

Numerous Islamic projects have emerged since the 19th century, following the awakening, aimed at reforming the condition of the Islamic Ummah and addressing its severe civilizational decline. We will focus on the contemporary period and some efforts that have sought to dispel the suspicion of imitation (Taqlid) in order to resume sapiential or philosophical creativity. Taha Abderrahmane argues that the negation of imitation can only be achieved through the Muslim sage's or philosopher's ability to articulate a philosophical discourse unprecedented by others, and to make others hear what has never reached their ears before (طه ع.، فقه الفلسفة 2 القول الفلسفي كتاب المفهوم والتأثيل، 2005، صفحة 12), In addition to the capacity to achieve creativity, Abderrahmane contemplates how we can make our intellectual creativity expand our humanity on the one hand, and activate our faith on the other. That is, how to create a broad humanity and an active faith. He states: "There is no creativity unless the researcher rids himself of the inferiority complex, whereby he belittles himself and aggrandizes others; he must regain self-confidence and belief in his ability to resume contribution" (طه ع.، 2016، صفحة 107), This leads us to discuss the dismantling of secular Western Eurocentrism, which idolizes the fetish of abstract reason, represented by the project of modernity. We must abandon this abstract rationalization in favor of exploring an opposing rationalization that does not separate reason from the heart. The separation between them has led to the fragmentation of human perception, forcing reason into a trajectory that severed its causes, narrowed its horizons, and made formal abstraction its governing law (طه ع., ط، من الإنسان الأبتر إلى الإنسان الكوثر2, 2016, p. 50), Furthermore, we must explore "Aymanah" (faith-based paradigm) as an Islamic civilizational alternative to secularization.

Echoing a similar view, Abdelwahab El-Messiri asserts that the Western civilizational formation must become recognized merely as one civilizational formation with its own particularity among other human formations, thereby

stripping the West of its centrality and absoluteness. El-Messiri believes that the critique of modern Western civilization must be holistic; that is, it must encompass the entirety of the Western theoretical edifice, because stopping at a partial level leads us to mere patching and fabrication (المسيري ، 2012، صفحة 330).

5) Islamic Philosophy and Its Future Role in Revitalizing Human Civilization:

An observer reflecting on the trajectory of Western civilization, particularly in recent decades, will realize that the intellectual project upon which it is based—manifested in modernity and postmodernity, both resting on the same foundational intellectual premises and pillars, perhaps the most important being secularization—severs humanity completely from its balanced spiritual and material reality. In this sense, Western civilization has largely exhausted human energy. This human being is constructed upon a vulgarized concept that the West sought to establish from the Renaissance through to contemporary man, who, as Taha Abderrahmane observes, is merely a nomadic idea that belongs to no specific place, but rather to the entire world, If any seeker of wisdom were to contemplate this contemporary human, they would find that he is no longer capable of utilizing all the capacities bestowed upon him in this life. This is a logical consequence of the dominance of instrumental reason over all aspects of his life, which has resulted in the exacerbation of his problems with the universe subjected to him. This has spawned axiological crises that degrade him to the level of bestiality and beyond, as well as severe ecological crises that threaten his very existence on this earth. Likewise, his problems with his own self and body have intensified, leading to dangerous biological crises that grow in severity and intensity by the day.

Despite this, humanity remains ever optimistic about a better future. Here we ask: Is Islamic philosophy capable of restoring to humanity its squandered humanness? And how can it do so? Malek Bennabi (1905–1973 CE) observed that the Islamic world has regained its vitality, stating: "Today, the Islamic world is moving toward the hoped-for tomorrow; in other words, its history has regained its momentum and life has flowed back into it, as it has become dynamic, and certain horizons have recently opened up to it" (بن نبي ، 2005، صفحة 155), The essence of his statement is that signs have emerged in the Islamic world which reveal to the observer that it can make a civilizational difference in the world. It remains for these

societies, "which seek to preserve their civilizational existence first, rely on it to achieve their civilizational renaissance second, and play their pivotal role in their surroundings and the world third, to have no choice but to wager on a balanced, normative (Sunani) epistemological integration, and on a balanced cosmic vision as well" (119 صفحة ،2007 ، برغوث), Balanced epistemological integration assimilates the data of God's universal laws (Sunan) in the horizons as well as in human souls, thereby expanding the scope of human consciousness regarding what is subjected and available to him. Given the profound and dominant impacts of contemporary Western civilization on all of humanity, the entire human race suffers from the crisis of the absence of a balanced, referential, normative cosmic perspective or paradigm. Such a paradigm would reconstruct a balanced view of humanity, life, the universe, and the movement of history in a way that helps humans achieve integration and harmony in their lives and civilizational movement (برغوث, 2007, p. 39).

The most crucial role in the equation of attaining the new, optimistic Islamic civilizational alternative remains dependent on the divine-oriented human (Al-Insan Al-Rabbani), who proceeds from a faith-based, stewardship (Istikhlafi) vision that transcends the natural/material given. This individual, who is ultimately "a human... with his own small story, yet it is an echo of shared humanity and the grand human story" (476 صفحة ،2002 ،العلمانية الجزئية و العلمانية الشاملة ،المسيري), must fulfill his entrusted role in revitalizing human civilization.

Conclusion:

Perhaps the most important conclusion drawn from this modest research on the role and importance of Islamic knowledge and sciences in the advancement of nations and societies—using Islamic philosophy as a model—is that Islamic philosophy, or Islamic wisdom, is the intellectual creativity achieved by the genius of wise Islamic minds. It represents the synthesis that brings together Islamic scholastic theology, the principles of Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic Sufism, and Islamic philosophers. These intellectual fields and Islamic sciences constitute the mosaic of Islamic philosophy or wisdom. It has presented to the world, and will continue to present, the Muslim's renewed vision of the world, the universe, and reality—meaning everything that occupies human thought—through a monotheistic, stewardship-based premise.

Hence, we can highlight the following key findings:

1. Although the radiant light and creativity of Islamic philosophy or wisdom have declined for centuries, this is due to stagnation and reliance on various reductionist visions.

2. Renewal in Islamic philosophy or wisdom can only be achieved through our Arab-Islamic civilizational context, with its knowledge, sciences, terminology, concepts, and methodologies—that is, through its worldview. This is what enables Islamic philosophy or wisdom to resume its contributions and creativity in a world governed by a Faustian instrumental reason, which has spawned numerous axiological, ecological, and biological crises capable of devastating human existence on this earth.

Therefore, at the outset of any new thinking that aspires to global intellectual leadership, one must strive to activate the values and methodology of a human civilization built upon a monotheistic, Islamic, stewardship-based vision. Herein lies the importance and the entrusted role of Islamic philosophy or wisdom in the advancement of nations and societies in the optimistic future.

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