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Islamic philosophy
yearbook

№ 6
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Ishraq



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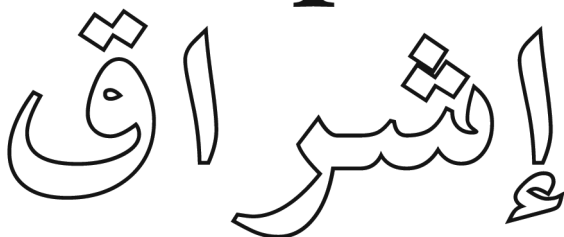
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The sixth issue of the yearbook of Islamic philosophy “Ishraq” (“Illumination”) contains more than twenty articles in Russian, English and French, devoted to a wide range of issues, current in Islamic philosophical thought, written by the leading Russian and foreign experts in the field.

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II

ЭТИКА И ФИЛОСОФИЯ РЕЛИГИИ

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MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Andrey Smirnov

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CARE FOR LIFE IN MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC THOUGHT: A LOGIC-AND-MEANING APPROACH

Life and death are natural phenomena. Everyone is familiar with them: all humans are alive, some non-human beings are also alive (we call them animals), while others are not (we call them inanimate beings; they are “dead things”).

Those two statements appear obvious, self-evident and even commonplace: it looks like there is no need to prove them. Yet there is a significant difference between the two. The first refers to a biological fact, and in that sense it is rooted in nature and our everyday experience of the world. The second has a logical, rather than biological, character.

There is a difference between biologically rooted and logically rooted statements, which has to do with their universality. We believe that, biologically, all human beings and, in a sense, all animate beings share certain basic traits. This applies at least to the fact that all animate beings come into life, experience it, and then taste death. So life and death are really universal, and there could hardly be any doubt about that.

What calls for certain elaboration is not the biological fact itself, but rather the logic of dealing with it; I mean the way we expect it to enter the domain of our reasoning. The question that I have in mind is the following. Can we expect any given culture ever developed by humankind to discuss life and death in terms of the “life/death” dichotomy (provided this culture is interested in such discussion)? We can expect all cultures to regard life and death as universal natural biological phenomena, but is there anything to suggest that they all will

universally use the same logic of the “life/death” dichotomy to theorize about these phenomena?

This question calls for further clarification. Fundamental biological facts are universal for human beings. Does this not apply to logic as well? We are inclined to qualify logic as a universal science, since it deals with universal forms of reasoning and constructing arguments. E.g., we can say that anything at all is either animate or inanimate, and there seems to be no exception to that obvious fact. The law of the excluded middle has a logical nature, but it is nonetheless universal and seems to be verified by our everyday experience. In Europe, Russia, China or the U.S., this statement remains true, just because it is universally true. So why at all should we doubt the universal applicability of the “life/death” dichotomy logic of reasoning about life and death as universal biological phenomena?

Our statement “anything is either animate or inanimate” is a perfect universal truth. Again, there is no doubt about that. And yet, let me note the following. There are many logically flawless statements that make little sense. “Humans are not stones”: is it not a genuine, rock-solid truth? But what can we do with that truth; is it of any use for us? I think it is not. We can produce an infinite set of such useless truths that are logically perfect—and yet senseless. Yes, humans are not stones; so what? What do we gain when we make such a statement? Where can we proceed with it? We feel uneasy with a perfect truth in our hands, which is of no use.

Why is it so? I think the answer is: what we really need is not a statement which is just logically true, but rather a statement that *makes sense*. To make sense, a statement has to be true; yet to be true is not enough. If a statement remains an isolated truth, it is of no use to us. What we need is to put it in connection with other statements; we need to find its *connectivity*, its cohesion with all the other statements about the world. Only if and only when we observe such connectivity and cohesion, we feel that our world is coherent; it means that the world makes sense.

Suppose we agree with that. Then again, what’s wrong with the statement “anything is either animate or inanimate”? It is not only logically true; it has perfect connectivity as well. One would think about Porphyry (and later Boethius) with their universal tree of categories, where division of “body” into “animate” and “inanimate” comes as one of the necessary steps in the universal division of “substance” as the highest genus into subordinate species. This division is universal, because it was designed to embrace everything in our world; it is also universal, because it is the basis for all logically true statements and syllogisms, at least as long as we deal with the Aristotelian version of traditional logic.

Thus life and death, as universal biological phenomena, are digested and processed logically as “animate/inanimate,” as well as “mortal/immortal” dichotomies. Later, when Christianity gains control over minds, life and death are

discussed as the “mortality/immortality” opposition. Humanity is corrupted and mortal after the original sin; death comes as an interruption of the earthly life, but, what has greater importance, eternal Death threatens every human being unless (s)he gains access to the source of eternal Life. Even when alive, human beings might already be dead in a higher sense of the “life/death” dichotomy.¹ Christ came into our world to defeat Death and mortality with His death on the Cross. Death is defeated by a death, which opens a prospect of immortality instead of mortality.

This is, in a sense, a basis for Christian belief, and it is shaped again by the “life/death” opposition, which is still a dichotomy. The genuine life is life-in-Christ, and to be really alive, a human being needs to die for this world. Worldly life and life in the hereafter are regarded as a dichotomy, and choosing one of the two as our genuine life, we turn the other one into death. “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”²

The “life/death” dichotomy is deeply rooted in Western thought, both Greek and Christian. It is paralleled by the soul/body dichotomy. Set sharply as the mind/body Cartesian dualism in later times, this dichotomy is undoubtedly present in Greek philosophy. Platonic idealism supposes a clear-cut dividing line between the material and the ideal, and only the soul, and not the body, is a means to reach the divine and the true. It is hardly surprising that Neoplatonic flavor is easily discerned in the medieval Christian attitude towards body and soul. The body and its flesh is forever under suspicion, for it is potentially a ground for the Enemy always ready to pull us down into the abode of Death.

All this means that the vertical axis is predominant in (at least) Greek and Medieval periods of Western thought, and if we agree with Whitehead’s remark about Western philosophy being just a series of marginal notes to Plato, we can more or less extend this qualification to Western thought as a whole. Though running the risk of overgeneralization, we do not really distort or misrepresent its historical mainstream. The vertical subordination of the soul and the body presupposes the vertical orientation of human aspirations, starting with the hier-

¹ Here comes *cura vitae* proper, in the immediate sense of the term. This term applies, strictly speaking, only to the Christian worldview. I am trying to expand its limits. Is there a bridge between Christian and Islamic cultures, between Christian and Islamic ways of thinking about that topic specifically, in matters concerning care about our souls in the worldly life and in the hereafter? Such a link, if it exists, would not be exemplified by certain *shared concepts* or the like, because behind each concept there stands a logic of reasoning which links it to other concepts to build up an integral view of the problem. Before indulging in a search for such presumably shared concepts, we need to explore the logic which shapes the meanings engaged in Western and Islamic discourses. This logic-and-meaning approach, where logic explains how the meanings behave, and where meanings ground the logic that governs their behavior, is the only way to get across the “alterity border” in the case of those two cultures and the two ways of thinking.

² 1 Corinthians 15:22 (New International Version).

archy of values³ and passing down to their material, corporeal representation, let us say, in Gothic church architecture. We can trace its impact in metaphorical images like Jacob's ladder, where devils trying to pull human beings down and interrupt their ascent to heaven never remain without prey. Perfection is understood as an endless movement which transcends the earthly horizon and is supposed to elevate the human being high above it. The lower grades of this universal ladder become useless once they are passed: we need them only to climb up, and they have no independent value of their own. The subordination of the *civitas terrena* and *civitas Dei*⁴ comes as a good expression of this general trend.

What we call a "mother tongue" is a "built-in" language that shapes our primary perception and conceptualization of the world. We are not free to choose our mother tongue, and once we have acquired it, we cannot substitute it with another language. Similarly, we all belong to this or that "mother culture" which shapes our expectation of the way in which the world would make sense to us. Life and death as natural phenomena make sense to us as a "life/death" dichotomy presupposing vertical subordination and relevant logic of dealing with mutually excluding opposites. What I tried to do above was sketch a general outline of reasoning which proceeds from those premises.

Just like mother tongue, a "mother culture" is something we are not free to choose or substitute with an alternative we like. If my mother tongue is Russian, it does not mean I cannot master Spanish, Arabic, or English; it only means they are not my mother tongues, i.e., that in my case they are not built-in, but rather added-in. What I understand by "culture" has a much broader scope than language; in that sense we can speak of "Western culture," though there is no "Western language." But still, the similarity between language and culture exists: if our mother culture is Western, it does not mean we cannot understand Islamic or Chinese culture; it only means that this understanding is realized not as a built-in, but rather as an added-in way of perception and conceptualization of the world, that is, the way in which the world makes sense to us and is present in our consciousness.

It is natural for a human being to expect others to behave the same way (s)he does. "To behave the same way" does not mean to perform the same movements

³ E.g.: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19–21, New International Version).

⁴ "Two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience" (St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIV, Chap. 28 "Of The Nature of the Two Cities, the Earthly and the Heavenly," transl. Marcus Dodds, in Augustine, *The City of God*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871.—Internet Medieval Sourcebook: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/aug-city2.html>, 01.06.2015).

or pronounce the same words, but rather to proceed from the same logic of reasoning. It is also natural for a researcher to expect another culture to behave the same way his or her mother culture does. A student of foreign language naturally tries to imitate his or her mother tongue, and in the same manner we naturally follow the hermeneutic habits of our mother culture when we explore a foreign culture, and try to understand how it causes the world to make sense.

When we shift to the domain of medieval Islamic thought, we find that discourse about life and death in terms of the “life/death” dichotomy is present there. Islamic authors speak of *ḥayāt*, “life,” opposing it to *ḥalāk*, “ruin,” or *mawt*, “death.”

The “life/death” dichotomy is there not only in the Qur’ān and the Sunna (the Traditions), but in early Islamic theoretical and philosophical thought as well. The Mu’tazilites used the term *ḥalāk* to denote the ontological state of non-being of any thing generally, the human soul included. The term is used later in the same meaning by authors writing on Islamic doctrine (*‘aqīda*). The human soul is “ruined” and “perishes” (*ḥalāk*) when it follows false teachings and, rejecting the true faith, acquires eternal torture instead of eternal bliss. This idea is always present when Islamic authors try to convince the reader that (s)he should choose true teachers and true belief and discriminate between the true Islamic belief and all the other, false teachings.

In that case, the dichotomy exists, and it is grounded in the mutually exclusive character of paradise and hell. After the Resurrection and Judgment, all human beings will be placed either in hell or in paradise, with no exclusion. This distribution is certainly dichotomic and follows the law of the excluded middle.⁵ It is somewhat blurred by the fact that it may be not final, and that believers condemned to fire torture in hell, or (according to some marginal traditions) even all inhabitants of the inferno, will spend a certain period of time in hell but will eventually be transferred to paradise to dwell there eternally. But even if hell remains empty, this does not deny the hell/paradise dichotomy which is paralleled by the *sa’āda/shaqāwa* (“happiness/torment”) dichotomy and similar sets of terms which are widely used in Islamic literature and are based eventually on the “hell/paradise” and “true belief/false belief” dichotomies.

All this is true, and yet the “life/death” dichotomy, as well as its derivatives, is not the mainstream of Islamic discourse on matters relating to life and death and to human destiny in this world and in the hereafter. Instead of such dichot-

⁵ An oft-repeated tradition (see al-Bukhārī 4453 and other) tells us that, after the Judgment is over, death (resembling a horn-eyed ram) will be brought forth. Dwellers of paradise and dwellers of hell will be asked if they know it. They will say: “Yes, it is death,” and then it will be slaughtered. After that they will never taste death and remain eternally (*khulūd*) in their abodes.

omy, we find *dunyā/’ākhira* and *dunyā/dīn*: two basic oppositions of a non-dichotomic character.⁶

The term *dunyā* is an abbreviation of the expression *ḥayāt dunyā*, “nearby life,” by which our life on earth is designated. *’Ākhira* is an abbreviation of *ḥayāt ’ākhira*, “the other life,” meaning human destiny in the hereafter, i.e., after the Resurrection and Judgment take place and people are distributed between paradise and hell. The *dunyā/’ākhira* opposition is an opposition of “this” and “that” life, of “earthly/posthumous” existence of human beings.

This *dunyā/’ākhira* opposition is paralleled by the *dunyā/dīn* opposition. *Dīn* means “religion,” and *dunyā/dīn* may be rendered as a “the here-and-now [life]/religion” opposition. Since *dīn* “religion” is, from the Islamic point of view, the only true teaching about *’ākhira* “hereafter,” it is in fact used in its stead, and in that sense the *dunyā/dīn* opposition is synonymous with the *dunyā/’ākhira* opposition.

To put our discussion of Islamic understanding of *ḥayāt dunyā* “earthly life” in the right perspective, let me note a thing which is of fundamental importance in that respect. Islam does not regard the earthly existence of humans as a long-term punishment for the original sin. Yes, it is true that Adam committed a mistake when he tasted the forbidden fruit; yet it is his own, and only his own transgression, and its consequences are not inherited by any of his descendants. Yes, it is true that after that forbidden fruit story Adam was transferred to earth; and yet by no means was it a Fall. On the contrary, God said to angels: “I will create a vicegerent on earth.”⁷ To be God’s viceroy—can one imagine a better, more dignified and elevated mission?

From the Islamic point of view, a human being is elevated above all the other creatures of God, angels included, by the fact of this Divine choice. It is stressed by the fact that angelic nature is much better than human;⁸ and yet God

⁶ Some idea about where the mainstream of Islamic thinking on matters of life and death lies will be given by the following figures. I used the *Al-Jāmi’ al-kabīr* digitalized encyclopaedia produced by al-Turāth (the largest collection of Islamic literature available) to count the frequency of the *ḥayāt/halāk* and *dunyā/’ākhira* oppositions in *tafsīr* (Qur’ān commentaries) and *ḥadīth* (traditions and their commentaries) literature (569 titles). I got 26 and 15,521 hits respectively. The frequency of usage speaks for itself. Let me add that the *dunyā/’ākhira* opposition is found almost in all of the 15 thousand hits within the same phrase, while the *ḥayāt/halāk* opposition, only on the same page and often in very different contexts, which in fact does not make up an opposition. The *ḥayāt/mawt* (life/death) opposition resulted in 252 hits. These figures may be somewhat modified by different techniques of search; e.g., if we add *al-* and search for *al-ḥayāt/al-mawt* (the life/the death) opposition, we get 1,747 hits, but many of those are cases where the expression *al-ḥayāt al-dunyā* (the nearest life) and *al-mawt* (death) are used on the same page but not in the same phrase or the same context. Anyway, the fact remains that the *dunyā/’ākhira* non-dichotomic opposition is between 10 and 100 times more frequent than the *ḥayāt/halāk* (and its lexical variants) dichotomic opposition.

⁷ Qur’ān 2:30 (transl. Abdallah Yousuf Ali).

⁸ Man was created from clay, while the *jinn* were made of fire (cf. Qur’ān 15:26–27.) Fire as a pure and stable element is undoubtedly better than the corruptible and evil-smelling clay, while angelic nature is certainly superior to that of the *jinn*.

orders angels to bow before Adam⁹ and acknowledge his highest rank. This is a starting point for Satan's revolt, as he considers such a bow to be a clear violation of God's *tawhīd*, "one-ness," which is the pivot of Islamic belief, since such a bow means worship and adoration, while only God, and not any of His creatures, may be worshiped.¹⁰

This angelic bow to Adam places man on an elevated grade very close to God; even dangerously close, for man finds himself somewhere on the dividing line between the Divine and the worldly. This is indeed a dangerous position from the point of view of Islamic doctrine, which insists on the strict dichotomy between *'Allāh*, "God," and *mā siwā 'Allāh*, "other than God": the disparity between the two is absolute, and no thing in the world can share anything with God. This elevated position of man was always a point of controversy in Islamic thought, where opposite trends can be easily traced: *Šūfī* tradition elaborated on it and even placed the human being above this "God/other-than-God" opposition,¹¹ while doctrinal thought always tried to stress that humans belong exclusively to this world.

This high (in fact, the highest possible) rank of man is not just a grace of God. God, of course, did choose man for that mission, but man made a return move when he accepted *al-'amāna*, "The Trust."¹² All the other parts of the uni-

⁹ "And behold, We said to the angels: 'Bow down to Adam;' and they bowed down: not so Iblis: he refused and was haughty" (Qur'ān 2:34 transl. Abdallah Yousuf Ali); see also 15:28–33.

¹⁰ Islam forbids to bow to anyone but God. There is a well-known tradition related by Ibn Ḥanbal which testifies to that. When Muḥammad tamed a violent camel by merely appearing before its eyes and made it sit down in front of him, his companions said that they, rather than the dumb and stupid creature, should prostrate in front of the prophet. Muḥammad answered: "It does not befit a human to prostrate in front of a human. Had it been acceptable for a human to prostrate in front of a human, I would have ordered woman to prostrate in front of her husband, so great is his right on her" (*Musnad Ibn Ḥanbal* 12635. Miṣr: Mu'assasat Qurṭuba, v. 3, p. 158). So, in a sense, Satan was right when he disobeyed God's command, for he rejected to worship anyone but God, and thus behaved as a true believer and follower of God. Some *Šūfī* authors discussed this topic at length with regard to the *tawhīd* principle.

¹¹ I mean the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī, and particularly his theory of the Perfect Human Being (*insān kāmil*) as *al-ṣḥay' al-ṥālith*, "the Third Thing," uniting the first two, i.e., God and the world, which was developed in the *Inshā' al-Dawā'ir* ("Drawing of Circles"), and later in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* ("Revelations of Mecca") and the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* ("Bezels of Wisdom").

¹² "We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it;—he was indeed unjust and foolish" (Qur'ān 33:72, transl. Abdallah Yousuf Ali). The last words ("unjust and foolish") are generally interpreted by commentators as "unjust" to himself by taking too hard a burden upon himself, "foolish" by not knowing what consequences will follow from his disobeying the Law. "The Trust" (*al-'amāna*) is interpreted as *farā'id*, "obligations," imposed by God, or *ṯā'a 'alā al-ṥawāb wa-l-'iqāb*, "obedience with reward [for following the Law] and punishment [for breaking it]."

verse, great mountains and mighty skies, rejected God's offer, and only the physically humble human being accepted it without hesitation. Thus the human being, the only creature in the universe, accepted responsibility and accountability for following God's "prescriptions and prohibitions" (*al-'amr wa al-nahy*); that is, he accepted obedience to the Law (*al-Sharī'a*) of God.

So, from the Qur'ānic perspective, the Law is not imposed on a human being as a hard and unwelcome burden. On the contrary, man chooses to follow the Law and to take upon himself the responsibility of it. This free choice makes man responsible before God and establishes a link between him and God. From now on, man is not just a marionette in God's hands, as any other creature is: a sort of interaction is established between man and God. Firstly, it is exemplified by the mutual movement of God and man towards each other: God chooses man to be His viceroy and offers him the *'amāna*, while man accepts the *'amāna* and responsibility to follow the Law. Secondly, every human being in his or her earthly life chooses between following and breaking the Law given by God, and thus reacts to God's offer of eternal bliss and, in a sense, chooses his or her own fate in the hereafter. Thirdly, God reacts to the earthly deeds of human beings when He holds the Judgment and decides their fate in the hereafter: this decision is not an arbitrary Divine act but a reaction to human deeds.¹³

If *tawhīd* ("one-ness") is the first pivot of Islamic doctrine which draws an absolute distinction between God (*'Allāh*) and the world (*mā siwā 'Allāh*, "other-than-God"), then *al-Sharī'a* 'Law' is its other pivot. But instead of stressing the distinction between God and the world, it establishes a link between the two, and this link passes through the human being. By accepting responsibility to follow the Law, the human being escapes the general fate of God's Creation: after the world's existence is over, humans will not perish forever, as every other creature will; instead, they will be recreated to partake of an endless existence. This endless existence, which will never cease, is the *ḥayāt 'ākhira*—"the other life."

Just as God and the world share nothing, *ḥayāt duniyā*, "earthly life," and *ḥayāt 'ākhira*, "the other life," have nothing in common.¹⁴ Nothing on earth can give us an idea of what eternal bliss (or, for that matter, eternal torture) is, just

¹³ This of course entails the question of *taqdīr*, "predestination," and its relation to human capacity of free act. That problem was discussed at length in Islamic thought, and a set of solutions was proposed, varying from the absolute autonomy of human will and act proclaimed by early Mu'tazilites to the absolute denial of it in the later doctrinal thought, with very interesting attempts of linking the two opposites to one another in Sūfī thought.

¹⁴ This is typically illustrated by incomparability of what is found in paradise to earthly things: though sharing the same names, they really have nothing in common. In paradise, everything is young, fresh and everlasting. Once Muḥammad during his prayer stretched out for something. When asked why, he answered: "The paradise was displayed to me. I stretched out for a bunch of fruits. Had I grasped it, you would have eaten of it as long as this world (*duniyā*) lasts" (al-Bukhārī 715 and many others).

like nothing in this world can give us an idea of what God is. If this is true, if the two opposites share nothing and have nothing in common, how at all can we speak of a link between the two?

I think the answer is: we need to think of such a link not in terms of a substance but in terms of a process. Had a link been something substantial, then we would have certainly faced a paradox: the two opposites that have nothing in common would have shared a common part or trait. But this is not the case when we think of such a link in terms of a process. The process links two sides, the active and the passive, without being their common part or trait.

Let me give an example. We can regard a “writing” hand and “written” signs as two substances. As such, they have nothing in common, they share nothing substantial,¹⁵ just like *Allāh*, “God,” and *mā siwā Allāh*, “other than God,” have nothing in common, or like *ḥayāt dunyā*, “earthly life,” and *ḥayāt ākḥira*, “the other life,” share nothing substantially. The “process of writing,” which links the writing hand to the written signs, is not a substance, and when we establish such a uniting link we still can hold that the two opposite sides of a process, the active and the recipient, share nothing substantial. And yet the uniting link is there. When we think in terms of processes, and not in terms of substances, we may establish the unity of the two opposites without anything substantial being common to them.

To think in terms of a process instead of a substance means not just a semantic alteration, but a shift of logic as well. If the two opposites are not dichotomically related substances (or qualities of a substance) but the two sides of a process, then to keep the process going we need to care about both sides, and not to choose between them or subordinate one of them to the other. Moreover, there needs to be a sort of harmony and correspondence between the two, just like there is a correspondence between a “writing” hand and “written” signs. It would be absurd to imagine that one of the two needs to be suppressed in order to make the other side happy. In the same manner, when we think of *ḥayāt dunyā* and *ḥayāt ākḥira* as the two sides of a process that links them together, it would be absurd to deny or suppress any of the two equally necessary sides of that process: this would ruin the link and lead to corruption instead of perfection.

This accounts for the general life-preserving attitude in Islam. There are many examples that testify to that, and *fiqh* (Islamic law and jurisprudence) and *‘aqīda* (Islamic doctrine) literature is full of them. A very convincing formula belongs to al-Muḥāsibī, a famous mystic of the 9th century: “The best of our

¹⁵ Putting it in Aristotle’s perspective, we discover that the active and the passive sides of a process belong to two different categories, i.e., to the two highest genera that have nothing in common. Interestingly enough, among the highest genera there is no category that would enable us to grasp the process *per se*, as distinct from its active and passive sides: process as such does not fit in Aristotle’s substance-based universe.

people are those who are not diverted by their other life (*'ākhira*) from their nearest life (*dunyā*), nor by their nearest life from their other life."¹⁶ Al-Muḥāsibī is renowned in Islamic culture for the claim he made about the necessity to constantly control one's soul and all its movements and desires, and to regard it from God's point of view, every moment giving an account of it *sub specie aeternitatis*.¹⁷ But even that exceptional stress on the eternal and Divine, on the necessity to remember constantly "the other life" does not mean in the least degrading this earthly life, underestimating or suppressing it.

This appeal not to forget the earthly life when indulging in "the matters of the other life" (*'umūr al-'ākhira*, as Islamic authors put it) is, of course, addressed only to the pious. As for the ordinary people, they hardly tend to forget the nearest life, and therefore, for them, *ḥathth 'alā al-'ākhira* ("motivation for the other life") is relevant to balance their natural obsession with earthly things. An excellent wording for this attitude is found in Ibn Kathīr's commentary on the Qur'ān. Elaborating on 62:9¹⁸ and citing similar verses, he writes: "The Supreme God says: The nearest life, its beauty and ornamentation, the sweets of selling and profiting do not detract them from remembering their Lord who is their creator and nourisher; they know that what He has is better and more profitable for them than what they have in their hands: what they possess will pass, but what God possesses will stay."¹⁹ The beauty of earthly existence and the sweets of trade are not denied, nor are they condemned. They are opposed to the sweets of the other life only on the basis of their temporary and transient nature, but not because they are bad as such or diminish the eternal award. The opposition between the temporary and the eternal is the basic difference between *dunyā* and *'ākhira*,²⁰ but this does not in the least deny the value of earthly life.

The correct attitude is a balance between the two, when both are cared for. This is what al-Muḥāsibī stresses; his call for a correct balance of the two lives,

¹⁶ خيار هذه الامة الذين لا تشغلهم آخرتهم عن دنياهم ولا دنياهم عن آخرتهم (Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, Bayrūt: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1998, p. 60; repeated in the same wording by al-Iṣbahānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, 4th ed. Bayrūt: Dār al-kitāb al-'arabī, 1405 h., v. 10, p. 88, then al-Subkī, *Tāj al-Dīn, Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya al-kubrā*, Hajar li-t-ṭibā'a wa al-nashr wa al-tawzī', 1423 h., v. 2, p. 282 and later al-Sha'rānī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, Bayrūt: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1418 h., p. 108).

¹⁷ Hence his *laqab* (nickname) *al-Muḥāsibī* which means "the one who gives (or demands) an account."

¹⁸ "O ye who believe! When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday, hasten earnestly to the Remembrance of God, and leave off business: that is the best for you if you but knew!" (transl. Abdallah Yousuf Ali.)

¹⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, Bayrūt: Dār al-fikr, 1410 h., v. 3, p. 296.

²⁰ Consider the following Qur'ānic verse: "What is the life of this world (*dunyā*) but play and amusement? But best is the home in the hereafter (*'ākhira*), for those who are righteous. Will you not then understand?" (Qur'ān 6:32, transl. Abdallah Yousuf Ali). *Dunyā* is called "play" because it passes and does not stay, like any game does, commentators explain.

and not for an exclusive accent on one of them, perfectly fits in the general perspective of Islamic culture.

While the ordinary people tend to forget about “the other life,” some of them may behave in the opposite way and decide to sacrifice or suppress earthly life this or that way for the sake of the other life. We will discuss such cases soon and see that this attitude is not accepted by Islam as well. The most general representation of the right correspondence principle is the *zāhir/bāṭin* “outward/inward” balance. It is also expressed by al-Muḥāsibī: “Who is zealous in his inward (*bāṭin*) will be granted by God good treatment in his outward (*zāhir*). And who perfects his outward treatment and is zealous in his inward will be granted by God guidance on the way to Him.”²¹ As we see, the desired fruit of God’s grace results from the *zāhir/bāṭin* “outward/inward” balance, and not from labor on the inward side exclusively. This applies to the *dunyā/’ākhira* opposition as well, where earthly life is the outward, and the other life, the inward side of this correspondence.

This means that both lives are necessary, and neither of them denies the other. They are not of a dichotomic character, and man is not urged to choose between the two. On the contrary, he is urged to forget neither of them. It is not right to ask God for a good portion in the earthly life only, disregarding the other life; but it is absolutely right to ask for benefits both in earthly life and in the hereafter, on an equal basis: “There are men who say: ‘Our Lord! Give us (Thy bounties) in this world!’ But they will have no portion in the hereafter. And there are men who say: ‘Our Lord! Give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter, and defend us from the torment of the Fire!’ To these will be allotted what they have earned, and God is quick in account.”²² The Qur’ān and the Sunna do not urge the believer to turn his back on the earth and stare into the heaven.

There is an interesting tradition connected with that Qur’ānic verse. The prophet came to visit someone overpowered by disease. “What did you ask the God for?” Muḥammad inquired. The man said: “I was praying: O God! Whatever punishment is in store for me in the hereafter, hurry up with it in my earthly life.” Muḥammad said: “God Almighty, you will not be able to bear it. Why didn’t you say: Our Lord! Give us good in this world and good in the hereafter, and defend us from the torment of the Fire!” After that the prophet prayed for that man, and he recovered.²³ This tradition is characteristic of the general Islamic attitude which excludes a positive evaluation of anything like Job’s suffering. Moses prays for his people and quite typically asks God for good (*ḥasana*) both in earthly life (*dunyā*) and the other life (*’ākhira*) (Qur’ān 7:156).

²¹ من اجتهد في باطنه ورثه الله حسن معاملة ظاهره ومن حسن معاملته في ظاهره مع جهده باطنه ورثه الله تعالى الهداية اليه (Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, Bayrūt: Dār al-kutub al-’ilmiyya, 1998, p. 60).

²² Qur’ān 2:200–202 (transl. Abdallah Yousuf Ali).

²³ *Ḥadīth Ismā’īl bin Ja’far*, [n.p.], p. 74.

Dunyā and *'ākhira* are not subordinated but rather coordinated, so it is absurd to imagine that suffering in earthly life brings bliss in the hereafter. On the contrary, *dunyā* and *'ākhira* are never contraposed in that respect; rather, there exists a balance between the two. The cases of their contraposition that we find in traditions have to do with prohibitions imposed by Islamic law and Islamic ethics: believer is told that drinking alcohol (*khamr*) in this life deprives him of it in the hereafter;²⁴ those who wear silk or use gold and silver tableware in their earthly life will be forbidden to use it in the life to come.²⁵ This only stresses the opposition between this and the other life, as they have nothing in common substantially, and elaborates on the necessity to follow the Law, but does not in the least deny the process-established link and coordination between this life and the hereafter.

It is quite typical, from the Islamic perspective, to believe that righteousness brings bliss not just in the hereafter, but in earthly life as well.²⁶ any suffering in this world results only from sin, and believers should not suffer. This earthly life is not a ladder used to climb to heaven but a “riding animal” (*maṭīyya*) that takes us to “the other life,” and we need to take every care of it.

To illustrate this, I will quote a tradition from ‘Alī related by Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-*Shaybānī* (d.189 h.) as an argument for his thesis that *kasb* (acquiring [a bliss in the hereafter]) means not only obeying the Law (*tā’āt*) and fulfilling obligations but also “cooperation” (*ta’āwun*) for the sake of such obedience. The latter includes any work performed in *dunyā* (“earthly life”) and connected, one way or another, with *tā’āt*, e.g., tailor’s craft, because one has to be dressed when going to prayer, etc. This attitude was indicated by ‘Alī, al-*Shaybānī* points out, “when he said: ‘Do not abuse earthly life (*dunyā*), for what a perfect riding creature (*maṭīyya*) earthly life is for a believer to take him to the hereafter (*'ākhira*).’ ” Al-*Shaybānī* adds: “A man asked ‘Abū *Dharr* (a companion of the prophet.—A. S.)—God be content with Him—what is the best deed after faith, and he said: ‘Prayer and eating bread.’ The man looked at him as if surprised, so he added: ‘If it were not for the bread, the Supreme God would not have been worshiped,’ that is, bread gives strength to our flesh, so that one can obey obligations (*tā’a*).”²⁷ Al-*Sarakhsī*, a famous Ḥanafī faqih (d. 483 h.), refers to this

²⁴ Malik 1542: *Muwatta’ Malik*, Miṣr: Dār ihyā’ al-turāth al-‘arabī. v. 2, p. 846; *Musnad al-Shāfi’ī*, Bayrūt: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, p. 281.

²⁵ Ṭayālīsī 43: *Musnad al-Ṭayālīsī*, Bayrūt: Dār al-ma’rifa, p. 10.

²⁶ As an example, let me quote a Qur’ānic passage about “the godly men” (*rabbiyyūna*) of the past: “All that they said was: ‘Our Lord! forgive us our sins and anything we may have done that transgressed our duty: establish our feet firmly, and help us against those who resist faith.’ And God gave them a reward in this world (*thawāb al-dunyā*), and the excellent reward (*thawāb al-'ākhira*) of the hereafter. For God loveth those who do good” (Qur’an 3:147–148, transl. Abdallah Yousuf Ali).

²⁷ Al-*Shaybānī*, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, *Al-Kasb*, Dimashq: ‘Abd al-Hādī Ḥarṣūnī, 1400 h., p. 62.

tradition in his voluminous *al-Mabṣūṭ* when he stresses that it is a mistake to hold that earthly deeds, like growing plants and trees or constructing buildings, imply love for earthly life and, consequently, diminish the reward in the hereafter: on the contrary, agriculture, construction, poultry and animal husbandry, etc.—all these deeds performed by a believer in earthly life bring additional advantages (*ṣadaqa*) in the hereafter.²⁸

Islamic system of values places life on the highest grade. This is true for “the other life,” of course, for Islamic Law was given expressly to grant success in the other life. But this applies fully to “the nearest life” as well. Life as such is the highest value and it cannot be sacrificed for anything at all. I can think only of two reservations about that general statement.

First, we need to differentiate between the life of the whole *‘umma* (world Islamic community) and the life of a person or a few persons. When Islam stresses the imperative of life preservation, the life of the whole *‘umma* is meant in the first place, and then the life of every individual believer. This follows from one of the fundamental claims Islamic doctrine makes, namely, that the *‘umma* as a whole will be preserved and will not perish until the Day of Judgment. It means that, in a situation when you have to choose between the life of the whole *‘umma* and the life of a few individuals, you have to choose the former. Let us imagine that a war between the Islamic *‘umma* and the rest of the world broke out, and its outcome will be decided in a single battle where the Islamic army besieges an enemy fortress in which a number of Muslim hostages, let us say, merchants, are held. Further on, it is known for sure that they will perish if the Muslim army attacks the enemy fortress; on the other hand, it is nonetheless certain that if it does not attack the fortress, the war will be lost and all the Muslims in the universe will perish. Only in such a case, when we face such an alternative, does Islamic law permit the sacrifice of a few Muslim lives in the enemy fortress; but in any other case it strictly prohibits it, and individual life cannot be sacrificed for anything at all.

Second is the case of *jihād*. A well-known tradition holds that a Muslim who stepped out to fight for the sake of God has God’s guarantee either to return home safe and sound or to be granted paradise. However, this is not a sacrifice, and a Muslim has no right to die intentionally (seek death or kill himself on purpose) on the battlefield. Moreover, *jihād* after Muhammad’s death is supposed to be of defensive character and is lawfully declared only to save the Islamic *‘umma* from destruction, so in fact this consideration is reduced to the first one.

In any other case, as Islamic authors like al-Ghazālī point out, human life cannot be sacrificed for anything, even to save other human being(s) from death; and this applies even to the closest relatives.

²⁸ Al-Sarakhsī, *Al-Mabṣūṭ*, Bayrūt: Dār al-ma‘rifā. v. 23, p. 14–15.

The general life-preserving attitude of Islam embraces not only human beings, but all living creatures as well. No animal may be killed “just for the hell of it,” for amusement. Man has the right to hunt and kill wild creatures only in order to feed himself if he cannot gain food in any other way, and only inasmuch as it is necessary to keep him and his family alive. Hunting for amusement is prohibited.²⁹ Moreover, insignificant insects like ants or evil and harmful creatures like snakes may be killed only if they in fact threaten human beings, and not out of “just in case” considerations. The same preserving principle embraces dead stock as well, even on enemy territory in case of war: a Muslim army has the right to destroy anything only inasmuch as required by war needs, but no more. The general expression of this principle and attitude is the following: maximizing the good and minimizing the evil.

Earthly life and the other life are not subordinated but linked as the two sides of a single process;³⁰ in the same manner the soul and the body are not regarded as being poles apart. This attitude is grounded in one of the basic Islamic theses about human nature (*fiṭra*) as sound and not in the least affected by Adam’s sin. Human flesh is not prone to evil, if kept within its natural bounds, and those limits are stipulated by Islamic law. The flesh and the body are not under suspicion, they need not be tamed or suppressed. This is one of the reasons why Islam rejects monachism. Body and soul are typically regarded as the two sides, the outward (*ẓāhir*) and the inward (*bāṭin*), of the process of performing deeds (*a’māl*). Any deed is understood as a link between *niyya*, “intention,” and *fi’l*, “action,” where “intention” is the soul’s concentration on the chosen aim and “action” is a movement performed by bodily parts (tongue, head, etc.). The soul and the body are equally necessary prerequisites for any deed, related to both worship (prayer, etc.) and mundane affairs (marriage, trade deals, etc.), and human perfection is understood as a perfect balance and coordination between the

²⁹ I speak of the norms of the Law, not about their implementation; as anywhere, they were often transgressed and broken in the real life of Islamic communities.

³⁰ Let us note that absence of the *dunyā/’ākhira* (“earthly life/the other life”) dichotomy does not in the least mean that they are “mixed up” in Islamic doctrine or that they are “not sufficiently differentiated,” or the like. On the contrary, the difference between the two is always stressed, and *ḥadīth al-ta’bīr* (“pollination tradition”) is often cited to illustrate it. Once Muḥammad was passing by some people who were preparing for artificial pollination of a date palm. They asked him whether they should proceed with pollination, and Muḥammad answered that they should rather leave it. As the palm would then remain without dates, those people asked Muḥammad why. He said that in earthly life they should proceed on their own way, and added: *Antum a’lam bi-’amr dunyā-kum*: “You know better your earthly life business” (Muslim 2363: *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Dār iḥyā’ al-turāth al-’arabī, v. 4, p. 1836). But differentiation does not mean dichotomy, and it is hardly possible to speak of a secular/ecclesiastic dichotomy in Islamic culture, where we do not find secular power opposed to church power, canon law as opposed to secular law, or secular art (architecture, poetry) as opposed to spiritual art, etc.

two sides in such a manner that flawless (approved by Islamic doctrine, law and ethics) deeds are easily performed.³¹

I will conclude this paper with its short overview. The Arabic language and Arabic culture harbor the hermeneutic habit of making a process the starting point of interpretation and sense-generation. In the domain of this culture, the world makes sense as a collection of processes, and not as a collection of substances.

From this perspective, a human being is understood not as a substance; a human being is rather interpreted as a process of transition between the two lives: the earthly one (*dunyā*) and the life-to-come (*'ākhira*). This process of *dunyā-'ākhira*-transition is paralleled by mutual movement of God and man towards a meeting point which is the Law: proposed by God and accepted by man, Law makes the *dunyā-'ākhira* movement possible. Earthly life and the future life are opposites, but they are both necessary and therefore cherished, each has its own value—but only when linked to its opposite. In the same way, a human being is not a substance but a process-established link between the body and the soul.

In this mutual relation of balance and correspondence between *zāhir*, “outward,” and *bāṭin*, “inward” (*dunyā* and *'ākhira*, the body and the soul) perfection is reached as stability and fixedness of this balance and correspondence, and not as an exclusive development of one of the dichotomic opposites. This reading of perfection implies a metaphor of a horizontal rather than vertical axis.

An integral logic-and-meaning transformation takes place when we discuss the universal biological fact of life and death from the perspective of Arabic and Islamic thinking. The logic of “life-and-life” coordination (i.e., the “outward-inward” balance and correspondence), rather than the “life/death” dichotomy, is relevant in this perspective. This does not in the least deny any of the absolute truths produced by the “life/death” dichotomy logic. The problem with them is not that they are not true (on the contrary, they remain perfectly true); the problem with them is that they make little sense in the “life-and-life” process-based perspective of reasoning. To weave a cohesive and connective fabric of reasoning from this logic-and-meaning perspective, we need a different set of logical truths which have no less universal value but comply with the process-based thinking of Islamic culture.

³¹ The Neoplatonic reading of the soul-to-body relation was widespread in Islamic culture among those who followed *falsafa* (Greek-inspired philosophy) teachings. This interpretation runs contrary to what I am speaking of and what expresses the Islamic reading of those matters.