

‘Aql al-Kullî Meets the Logos of Life: A Cross-Cultural Path Towards a New Enlightenment

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Abstract The current crisis, which not least is a crisis of reason, requires to be traced back historically to the dualistic-epistemic concept of Enlightenment. By following the here delineated revision of the “Old Enlightenment”, often called “Modernity”, the study will emphasize the vital necessity to pave the way for new approaches towards an Enlightenment which will have to be based on cross-culturality. Above all, regaining an understanding of *Oneness* is a challenge for a new vision, which likewise unifies spiritual wisdom with precise knowledge. Regarding especially the process of the individuation of the Divine, I will focus on the universal (‘Aql al-Kullî) reason in the structure of knowledge in the opus of *Ikhwan as-Safa* and the *Logos of Life* in the philosophy of Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. It shall be argued that with *Ikhwan as-Safa* the individuation of the principle of life found its earliest encyclopedic expression. The *Logos of Life* philosophy brings the current level of sciences into harmony with the moral sensitivity directing the communicative web of *everything-there-is-alive*.

Enlightenment in the Abbasside Caliphate

The college of the *Ikhwan as-Safa* lived and worked around the second half of the tenth century in the Abbasside caliphate (752–1258). Proceeding from an absolute universal reason (‘Aql al-Kullî), the brothers of sincerity developed a philosophically, scientifically and ethically established system of theories, which they employed on different systematically deduced disciplines, beginning from mathematics, natural sciences and anthropology to social sciences and theology. Science

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served for the deciphering of the immeasurable shaping of the divine creative power to bring this optimally into the service of society's well-being.

During the Abbasside caliphate the unfolding of reason and the progress in science in no way collided with metaphysical certainty. Also metaphysics and the concept of God did not conflict with humanism, having the human being as its centre. On the contrary, an understanding of reason, a divine quality that only befits the human being, motivates the quest for truth in the living nature that moves the world. The knowledge or realization of the self as human being in its microcosmological mode of being constitutes the initial point for the disclosure of laws in nature.

Precisely because the human being is a small world (microcosm) man, nature and the universe interact. In other words, a harmonic and communicative orchestration of being, which, instructed by human responsibility and constructiveness, unfolds its creative potentials.

Insights achieved from empiricism, experiment and abstraction were implemented in science and as a consequence benefitted society. The science historian George Sarton, who already in the 1960s initiated a discussion about a new humanism, saw in the experimental orientation of Arabic-Islamic science a breakthrough to modern science, to which the Greek contributed little:

Perhaps the main, as well as the least obvious, achievement of the Middle Ages, was the creation of the experimental spirit, or more exactly its slow incubation. This was primarily due to Muslims down to the end of the twelfth century, then to Christians. Thus in this essential respect, East and West cooperated like brothers. However much one may admire Greek science, one must recognize that it was sadly deficient with regard to this (the experimental) point of view which turned out to be the fundamental point of view of modern science.¹

The sciences had their foundation in ethics, wherein the elevation of reason and knowledge constituted the quintessence of being human, approaching cosmos, nature and human being theoretically and methodically in a multiperspectivity, which offers itself as an alternative to the current lapse, one-dimensionality and mere functionality of science. Enlightenment, therefore, has its starting point during the Abbasside caliphate; it is inspired with a specific concept of reason.

The scholars *Ikhwan as-Safa* differentiated this structure of reason and knowledge, initiating a wave of awareness, which continued to have a strong influence until scholasticism and the Renaissance. In consequence of the aberration of reason and the destructive turn and shift away from the once spiritually and humanistically oriented Enlightenment that occurred at the end of the European eighteenth century, this chapter will debate cross-culturally the current new paths toward a "New Enlightenment", which present themselves with the philosophy of the "*Logos of Life*" in the corpus of Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka.

¹George Sarton, *The History of Science and the New Humanism*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1962), pp. 99–100.

°Aql al-Kullî – Universal Reason

°Aql al-Kullî discloses itself to Ikhwan as-Safa as an initial and starting point of a process of living becoming, whereby the scholars follow the concept of Plotinus (205–270), developing it into a system of thought and teaching. The differentiated theory of Plotinus about the emanation of *nous* out of the free will of the One is also found in a number of contemporaneous works such as the Gnostic *Tractatus Tripartitus*. Out of the emanation and out of the father’s free will coming into being arises: “[. . .] for the free will which was begotten with the totalities was a cause for this one, such to make him what he desired, with no one to restrain him.”² The fall of the logos/nous shows the way to eternal salvation through the returning in the spheres of the immortal divinity. In the works of Plotinus as well as for Ikhwan as-Safa the coming down of the noetic soul out of the *One Multiplicity* or °Aql al-Kullî into the temporal and matter-bounded and the aspired yearning to re-becoming *One* is a continuous interplay of the universal soul (unity) and the partial or individuated souls (multiplicity) in the web of life.

The self-reflecting reason, emanating out of the *One* actualizes itself in the soul, which, endowed with wise sensitivity, uses *hylic* matter before becoming a specific being in life’s shaping (*physis*). Regarding the centrality of the sensitive and intellectual soul we do find a number of similarities between the thinking of Plotinus and that of Ikhwan as-Safa.³ Plotinus describes the soul as self-reflecting/reasoning and sensitive. For *Ikhwan as-Safa* life is the substance of the soul which emanates continuously out of it like the light out of the sun: “In the same way life emanates out of the soul on the bodies in as much as the life is substantial for the soul. It is then the form which constitutes its being.”⁴

We find the coming into being soul for the understanding of the plants in Plotinus as in Ikhwan as-Safa: “And so it holds true for the soul of plants that indeed they seem to be as lively as all souls are living. They had been sent out from one origin.”⁵ But what makes man a human being, who is distinguished from all the

² Nag Hammadi Deutsch (NHC) I, 5 75.28-29; *The Nag Hammadi Library in English (NHL)*, p. 72.

³ Friedrich Dieterici hat auf die Rezeption Plotinscher Konzepte durch Ihwan as-Safa aufmerksam gemacht; bei der sogenannten Theologie des Aristoteles – eine pseudo-aristotelische Schrift, die im Werk der laueren Geschwister erwähnt wird – handelt es sich um Übersetzungen in das Arabische aus den Enneaden. Vgl. Friedrich Dieterici, *Die sogenannte Theologie des Aristoteles aus dem Arabischen übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen versehen*, (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1883). “When the Latin translation of this Arabic reworking created the Liber de Causis, a genuine Plotinian view – moreover, one challenged in various ways by several post-Plotinian Platonists – also reached the Western Middle Ages.” Cristina D’Ancona, “Porphyry, Universal Soul and the Arabic Plotinus,” in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 9, 1999, pp. 47–88, p. 88.

⁴ Diwald, Susanne, *Arabische Philosophie und Wissenschaft in der Enzyklopädie. Kitab Ihwan as-Safa (III). Die Lehre von Seele und Intellekt*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975), p. 439. [quote translated by the author of this essay]

⁵ Friedrich Dieterici, *Die Philosophie der Araber im 10. Jahrhundert n. Chr.*, (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1876), p. 7. [quote translated by the author of this essay]

life, and yet at the same time woven into the inseparably meshed life. Here Plotinus underlines the dianoetic capacity of the human soul as the specific and essential characteristic of human beings.

The soul is as well endowed with reason as wishing sensitively to strive after the archetype on one side and its own expression on the other side. Originating out of the *nous*, the soul carries in itself a reasoning capacity which links it to the noetic and enables it to know the spiritual forms. This dianoetic capacity manifolds the reasoning unity of the *nous* into scientific and differentiated thinking.⁶

The emanating, endowed with reason and then descending soul wishes for shaping and perfection. It remains so long in the specific body as a partial soul until the desire to re-becoming-oneness with the universal soul urges for a departure from its *hylic* material shape. This process of self-individuation, originating from *‘Aql al-Kullî* is not haphazard or accidental. Nevertheless a process of continuous becoming and passing away the first and initial reason never acts destructive but improves the web of life progressively. It is only man who enables him-/herself to intervene destructively in life as it can be seen currently in the obviously man made catastrophes.

Following Plotinus we find in the opus of *Ikhwan as-Safa* the out of God emanating primary and original first reason, which orientates the soul. The *hylic* matter, as created nature, is – Plotinus characterizes it simply as “the silhouette and appearance of the intelligible world” – (Enn. VI. 3, 8) delineated by *Ikhwan as-Safa* as the last mold in a descending ladder as follows:

Reason is the light and the first emanation of the sublime creator. The soul is the light and emanation of the reason, which the Creator – he is great and noble – emanated out of Him. Again, the first hyle/matter is the shadow and the silhouette of the soul. The absolute shapes are the images, colors and forms which the soul transacts in the hyle/matter, with the allowance of the sublime creator, supporting the soul with reason at the same time.⁷

Man, striving after knowledge – in the sense to open up the field of science – is competent to develop reason and soul, and in doing so qualifies him-/herself as a human being. In this way s/he comes nearer to his/her origin and therefore nearer to God.

The above process of knowledge is ontologically legitimated by the fact that the individual souls are considered as faculties of the Universal Soul. If knowledge marks the passage from potentiality to actuality, such a passage depends on the ever existing Celestial Universal Soul, which is knowledgeable in actuality. The more each individual soul

⁶ Ilona Kock, *Ontologische Begründung von Ethik durch Einheitserfahrung im Denken Plotins und Ghazalis*, (Nordhausen: Bautz, 2011), p. 17. [quote translated by the author of this essay]

⁷ Diwald, Susanne, *Arabische Philosophie und Wissenschaft in der Enzyklopädie. Kitab Ihwan as-Safa (III). Die Lehre von Seele und Intellekt*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975), p. 470. [quote translated by the author of this essay]

increases its knowledge, the more it is close to the universal Soul. Consequently, epistemology finds itself strictly linked to ontology as the Ikhwan seem to ground science in the fourth “Neo-Platonizing” hypostasis of their cosmology.⁸

Ikhwan as-Safa developed out of the dianoetic process of life an evolutionary teaching, starting with degrees of mathematic abstraction – understanding *One* as a none-number and yet a precondition to all numbers – arriving at the differentiated multiplicity of being by natural sciences. After the world has been created in its most perfect form, taking the shape of a globe, life moves up from simple mineral and botanic to more complex shapes in zoological life before reaching its anthropological culmination. It is reason which makes human beings superior to animals, even if the latter are often physically stronger than man. Ikhwan as-Safa identify the human being, endowed with the talent of self-knowledge, as the crown of being. By striving to deepen knowledge, by enlarging upon scientific insights human beings approach their bright origin, and are being woven into the universe of life (macrocosm) as a microcosm. Sciences enable man to decipher the mesh of being.

However, since Darwin’s underlining of natural selection as a crucial motor of evolution this for centuries saved metaphysical ontology fell under suspicion. The knowledge of the communicative interplay of everything-there-is-alive was progressively replaced by an unforgiving rivalry in an endless struggle for existence. In addition, the trace of life’s reasoning sensitivity which is cultivated to moral sense in human beings was marginalized scientifically. Against this background it seems advisable to overcome the various reductionist approaches that are more urgent than ever, including a misleading understanding of natural selection. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka suggests:

Natural selection cannot move organisms as genetic networks form the generic states of the morphogenetic sequence. Seen correctly, a morphogenetic sequence is, in my view, open on to two sides: on one side, toward the conditions of the landscape, and on the other, toward the seminal genetic material of its field as it is energized and dynamized.⁹

Far away from a reductionist, deterministic and in a final step closed or teleological design of development, the sprouting New Enlightenment follows the auto-creative spiral direction of evolutive progress:

It is the self-prompting ontopoietic, entelechial fact that, through its spiral direction, brings forth new forms (new morphogenetic sequences), that is, new types of life. This is true along the scale of life’s development: organic, vegetative individualization; the rational modes of instinct and sensing valuation; instinctive selection; conscious deliberation with a limited choice; and, finally, the presentational, inventive rationalities of the human creative orchestration of faculties that prompt life.¹⁰

⁸ Carmela Baffioni (1998): “From Sense Perception to the Vision of God: A Path towards Knowledge according to Ikhwan as-Safa,” in: *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, Vol. 8, pp. 213–231, p. 216.

⁹ Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, *The Fullness of the Logos in the Key of Life, Book I., The Case of God in the New Enlightenment*, Analecta Husserliana, The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research, Vol. C, (Dordrecht: Springer 2009), p. 59.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

We find the spiral as a universal symbol, already in cave paintings millennia ago all over the world. Had there been awareness on the spiral direction of evolutive progress in the early history of humanity? Today knowledge deepens even beyond the nucleus of life, the cell, “a sort of prototype of the individual”.¹¹ Even if more than a 1,000 years ago Ikhwan as-Safa did not yet reach these deepest insights for example into the cell’s capacity of replication, they had been aware of life’s creativity directed by an inventive reason. By long-term observations they came to the result that life can even grow out of vegetation loss and mortifying substances. Life’s creativity is not reducible to narrow chains of scientific disciplinarity. The universal intellect pervades All-Being constructively. This has to be reflected not only inter-but transdisciplinary.

Encyclopedic Sciences and Enlightenment

The Opus of Ikhwan as-Safa can only deficiently be circumscribed as an encyclopedia for it is arranged towards an as-close-as-possible approach to unity in multiplicity, thereby transcending the borders of scientific disciplines. At the same time, the Ikhwan advanced in deepening specific knowledge of particular scientific fields while applying and combining several methods like experiments, logical or empirical ones. This mode of aspiring after truth is described by Sarton:

The unity of nature, the unity of knowledge, and the unity of mankind are but three aspects of a single reality. Each aspect helps to justify the others. That trinity is but the dispersion of a fundamental unity, which is beyond our material grasp, but within our loving hearts.¹²

Friedrich Dieterici elaborated the considerable contribution of Ikhwan as-Safa regarding the emergence of the genre “encyclopedia” from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards:

The encyclopedists like Diderot, D’Alembert, Maupertius, Grimm, Holbach, all of them were great in striving towards the origin of knowledge while seeking for unity. The particular or detail in science came to life interlinked with universality. Their vast opus might be forgotten but never its tremendous effect inspiring new brain work.¹³

Maybe it is that wish for an almost absolute compilation, systematization and classification of being which characterizes most precisely the relatively late European Enlightenment. If we consider Linnaeus’ (1707–1778) botanical systematization or Cuvier’s (1769–1832) comparative anthropology which had been strongly influenced by his *disaster theory*, it becomes obvious that the efforts to penetrate

¹¹ Ibid., p. 93.

¹² Dorothy Stimson (ed.), *Sarton on the History of Science*, Essays by George Sarton, (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 15.

¹³ Dieterici, Friedrich, *Der Darwinismus im zehnten und neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1878), p. 6 [quote translated by the author of this essay]

reality scientifically came along with a dualistic split of humanity. Humanity, hitherto understood as a unity, now had been hierarchically ordered. The Arabic term *ra'as* used for the classification in natural sciences was, after reinterpretation, now introduced to classify the human species. Kant introduced the term *race* into the German language thereby constructing a racist concept of mankind and history. On par with the here outlined developments in the history of ideas, life-reason in its scientific and spiritual dimension was scrapped in the nineteenth Century. Henceforth any understanding of development marked a novel departure which tended to overthrow traditions, which in turn were viewed as backwardness. First Hegel then Marx established the model of teleological progress which became a long-lasting myth in European history. Not only had the unity of human being been condemned but the unity of space and time was eliminated in favor of an inescapable progress that paved the way for the violence-based imperial power, saturating the earth with blood.¹⁴ Nature came to be revolutionized into a reservoir, which had to serve for destructive purposes.

In other words, the dualistic splitting of *Beingness* is an essential feature of nineteenth-century Europe, which dominated philosophy and thinking in general. Following an often disharmonic dialectic of polarization, *beingness* had been split into matter, idea, object, subject, being, consciousness etc. Then formerly all the life creatively woven in unity turned into a still ongoing work of destruction. In consequence of the waning away of assumed teleological certainties in “late modernity”, “post-modernity” became a kind of escapism, now refusing any path towards knowledge of the truth.

Logos of Life

The *Logos of Life* as being differentiated to an understanding of Fullness by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka unveils to human knowledge the “*reason of reason*” as vital animated Logos. Already in earlier writings, thereby following Leibniz, Tymieniecka drew attention to “*the multispherical constitutive pattern of the universe*”.¹⁵ According to Leibniz, strictly rejecting any anthropomorphism, God is essentially reason. Leibniz set himself the following task:

The challenge is now, to find *the cause of the existence of the world*, as the integration of all *accidental* things, and this in the substance, that bears the reason for its existence in itself and that is therefore necessary and eternal. This principle must be endowed with reason. [...] Moreover, this intellectually talented cause has to be infinite in every respect, its

¹⁴ A study by Karam Khella interlinks understandably the interplay between epistemic-dualistic and historic violence, see: Karam Khella, *Der umzingelte Geist, Vorlesungen über Erkenntnistheorie, Hermeneutik und Kritik der Wissenschaften*, (Hamburg: Theorie und Praxis, 2000).

¹⁵ Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, *Leibniz'Cosmological Synthesis*, (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 1964), p. 5.

power, wisdom and benevolence must be absolutely perfect; for it embraces every possibility.¹⁶

Nevertheless, with Tymieniecka any authoritative force is not attributed to divine wisdom – it is rather characterized by inexhaustible constructiveness and communicative creative power. The *Logos of Life* is now brought to light as vital animated (logo-theic, intellective triadic-noetic, feeling-sharing and inventive).

When the Ikhwan were able to define and work out the '*Aql al-Kullî* in its creative constructiveness in the becoming of minerals, plants, animals and finally the human being, they also pointed out the finest transitions from minerals to plants thus transcending the insights of the classical age (Aristotle) by far – for example by exposing the ambisexuality of the date palm, that was therefore classified as the highest form of botanic life – so the knowledge of the all-life-inspiring *sentient Logos of Life* is further developed in the *Ontopoeisis of Life*. Staying with the example of the plants, they become “metaphysical” in the *spatiotemporal schema of life* as it is also confirmed by the latest findings of natural sciences, for example, the cell as a kind of prototype of the individual:

The plant has a soul: it receives signals of light, humidity, pressure and possesses an intrinsic apparatus for responding to them. The plant assimilates some forces as propitiously bettering its existential condition. It responds to the attacks of predators, it bends before the wind, it may repair some degree of injury suffered by it, regenerating a damaged part, a capacity which seems crucial among the prerogatives of living beings.¹⁷

Soul (animus) is assigned to a harmonizing position in the self-individuation of life:

We may distinguish as many modes of the animus as there are kinds of living beings, from the simplest to the highest, from the vegetal through the simplest animalia, to the most complex of the human soul. The soul of the living being stands for reacting, sensitive, sentient, emotive factors of life's becoming. The animus, grounded in life's complexities, harmonizes them into a self-controlled, self-existent, living individual.¹⁸

A New Enlightenment will have to come into harmony with the balancing and auto-creative powers of reason. Reason-life flourishes in the richness of individual rationalities, reviving continuously horizons of this extraordinary thus sacral beauty. As communication will be the key to our new assessment of reason¹⁹ that interplays with the orchestration of life, not only the exploration of but to evolve

¹⁶ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Versuche in der Theodicee über die Güte Gottes, die Freiheit des Menschen und den Ursprung des Übels*, (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1996), p. 96. [quote translated by the author of this essay]

¹⁷ Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, “Differentiation and Unity, The Self-Individualizing Life Process,” in *Life, Differentiation and Harmony . . . Vegetal, Animal, Human*, ed. Marlies Kronegger, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), p. 20.

¹⁸ Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, *The Fullness of the Logos in the Key of Life, Book I., The Case of God in the New Enlightenment*, *Analecta Husserliana*, The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research, Vol. C, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), p. 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.

along cross-cultural paths will be crucial on the way towards a New Enlightenment. Against the attempts of splitting, separating and disentangling the web of life °Aql al-Kullî/Logos of Life are manifested in a unifying process. The sacral goodliness and beautiness is verified in the communicative sentience, sharing-in-life. In the New Enlightenment human reason will communicate with life-reason.

A comparative study and an encyclopedic review with the *Logos of Life* in its botanical, zoological and anthropological individuation in cooperation with professional colleagues from different disciplines would be a desideratum and challenge for further interdisciplinary research. Sciences should be re-harmonized with the constructiveness of °Aql al-Kullî/Logos of Life.

Towards a New Enlightenment

If man destroys the web of life at any place and time and with that, the harmonic as well as fragile texture of the cosmos, he will destroy himself. It is the ethical/moral sensitive embedding of knowledge which allows utilizing a substance for the good of human being or quite the contrary for destruction. Only a few degrees in variance can turn a remedy into a deadly poison.

With the beginning of the old enlightenment since the nineteenth century, the development of thinking and science has experienced a lapse which today finds expression in the oftentimes only successively apprehended crises. Even the term crisis sounds euphemistic. No branch of scientific research devours so many potentialities and resources as the military one, although “war” is scarcely perceived as a crisis in a society that is thoroughly characterized by a culture of violence. Meister Eckhart underlined that it is better to serve the poor than to cross the sea, an indicated critique of the crusades. The pathological doing violence is the peak of what can only roughly be described as crisis. The financial crisis is in most cases entirely decoupled from wars, the ecological or the climate crisis etc. But all these crises, that deeply gash society and natural habitats, are they not ultimately an expression of a crisis of human being or a move to the crisis of reason? Has reason turned destructive?

The philosophy of Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka allows us to reveal the fullness of the logos of life as a key to open the gates to a New Enlightenment, which have as yet been barred by scepticism, empirical reductionism and mathematic modelling, to a new vision of reason. In the encounter of °Aql al-Kullî with the *Logos of Life*, both of which are only notions of one inseparable divinity, a communicative determination toward a recurrence and to a cross-cultural New Enlightenment substantiates, that unfolds in keeping with the constructive potentialities in the web of life and hence reverts to the human destiny.

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