

Arab Ethical Mind: Inquiry into the Thought of Mohammad Abed al-Jabiri

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Over the past two decades, the end of the past century and the beginning of the new one, the Moroccan thinker Mohammad Abed al-Jabiri remained a figure of excellence, unrelenting effort, and encyclopedic knowledge of Arab *turath*, or "heritage." But his most notable accomplishment is unquestionably that he became the leading figure of a big project of thought at a time when all Arabic projects of thought, that once claimed to be radical and extensive have faded away after they were relinquished with imported ideologies and out-of-date symbols.

Throughout the historical and intellectual journey that starts with his first book, *Nahnu wa al-turath* [Our Heritage and

Us (1990)] and continues through his latest book, *al-Aql al-ikhlaqi al-Arabi* [The Arab Ethical Mind (2000)], al-Jabiri remained the spearhead of a new project of thought. He set the example for a new reading of the Arab that looks afresh into areas previously unexposed. To this end, al-Jabiri's work employs the tools of the latest theories in humanities in an effort to break through the wall of complete silence imposed by the ideological projects that have made everyone sick with the false stench of progress and an ideological modernity. This modernity relies more on "calculation than humanization" and leads only to the scene of rigid theories.

The eighties of the last century truly bore the mark of al-Jabiri who wrote during those years his most illustrious works in Arabic thought, beginning with *Nahnu wa al-turath* in 1980 and ending with *al-Aql al-siyasi al-Arabi* [Arabic Political Mind] in 1990. In the 1990s, Al Jabiri asserted his intellectual productivity in the fields of philosophy, politics, and debate. In the area of philosophy,

the nineties saw many precious works by al-Jabiri in which he examines carefully the problematics of contemporary Arab thought. I am referring to the books that complemented his critique of Arab reason: *Dimuqratiya wa huquq al-insan* [Democracy and Human Rights (1994)]; *al-Masa'ilah al-thaqafiyah fi al-watan al-Arabi* [Cultural Issues in Arab Countries (1995)]; *al-Din wa al-dawlah wa tadbiq al-shari'ah* [Religion, the State, and implementing the Shari'ah (1996)]; *Qidaya fi al-fikr al-Arabi al-mu'asar* [Issues in Modern Arab Thought (1997)].

In this same spirit, his most important book of the nineties, *al-Muthaqifun fi al-hadarah al-Arabiyyah* [The Intellectual in the Arab Culture (1996)], was the foundation of his work on the intellectual person of values in Arab civilization. He took both Ibn Hanbal and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) as examples for this principled intellectual, instead of getting lost in Western civilization, and more precisely the French civilization, to search for the new Dreyfuss of Emile Zola. In writing this book,

al-Jabiri sought to bring the revolutionary Arab intellectual back to shore, away from the foreign influence where this intellectual had been formed.

In this the quest, al-Jabiri emulated the Moroccan thinker Abdallah al-Arwi, in his book *al-Arab wa al-fikr al-tarikhi* [Arabs and Historical Thinking (1973)]. Al-Jabiri also sought to limit the estrangement of the intellectual elite who had distanced themselves from their heritage. On the political front, al-Jabiri sought, in the 1990s as well, to enter the political arena through what he named the "Historical Bloc," whose ends and means he explained while promoting it. He was convinced that any Arab project for revival, or *Nahda*, is essentially a political project aimed at introducing reform at the level of both state and society.

At the outset, al-Jabiri took part in a lively debate on the successes and failures of the Arab project of revival. I am most interested in noting his debate among Arab secularists whose motto was the separation of

state and religion as a prerequisite to establishing the modern state. Al-Jabiri believed that to give priority to secularism is to twist around the proper order of things. Democracy should occupy the premium position. Besides, if we separate religion and society, we take away religion from peoples' lives, which is a red line in Arab and Muslim society that cannot be crossed.

At the beginning of the nineties, al-Jabiri promised us a book on the Arab Ethical Mind. He is now fulfilling that promise, a decade after he made it. It is a known fact that this book is the fourth and last in al-Jabiri's four-book collection whose theme is the "critique of the Arab mind." The first book was entitled *Taqwin al-aql al-Arabi* [Foundation of the Arab Mind (1984)]; the second was entitled *Buniyat al-aql al-Arabi* [Structure of the Arab Mind (1986)]; and it was followed by the third, *al-Aql al-siyasi al-Arabi* [Arab Political Mind (1990)]. The fourth book comes out after a 10 year absence to complete the series.

During this period, al-Jabiri focused his attention on the problematics of Arab culture, the role of Arab intellectuals, and the Arab project for revival. He was, nonetheless, still able to put his efforts into his big project, the critique of Arab ethical mind. This project is the first of its kind. Arabic literature sadly lacks any serious, comprehensive, analytical and critical treatment of the system of values in Arab Islamic culture. According to al-Jabiri, Arabic literature lacks any work on even the history of the Arab ethical mind. From this, al-Jabiri is inspired to say that his work resembles that of an adventurer on whose shoulders lies the responsibility of discovering and describing a continent, while minutely studying all that is on it so he can connect everything with its origins. This continent in question is the home of a large heritage of values and ethics that can be traced back to five cultures.

To answer the reader's question about the nature of these five cultures that were combined with Arab civilization and

contributed to the formation of the Arab ethical mind, al-Jabiri defines them as the following:

First: The Persian Heritage: Ethics of Submission

Second: The Greek Heritage: Ethics of Happiness

Third: The Sufi Heritage: Ethics of Mortality

Fourth: The Pure Arabic Heritage: Ethics of Chivalry

Fifth: The Islamic Heritage: Ethics of Religion

The book is comprised of an introduction, a conclusion and twenty-three chapters spread along the introduction and five parts.

Al-Jabiri affirms, as stated above, that Arabic literature suffers from a lack of works concerning ethics. This literature is devoid of any serious attempt that could be described as

comprehensive, analytical, and could serve as a critique of the system of values present in Arab Islamic culture. In addition to this is the lack of writing on the history of Arab ethical thought. Al-Jabiri's work seeks to fill this gap and reinforce, from a structural point of view, a vision that reposes on two foundations:

The First being: What we call the Arabic ethical mind is that of the community and not of the individual: "The mind of the group as a system of values that guides the behavior of the group in thought, spirit and mind."

The Second being: Dealing with each and every one of these systems of value as a guide to the behavior of the group in the first place, meaning that they are ethical values that serve politics, taken as the management of the life of the group. The group in question can be a state, a movement opposing the state, or the religiosity of a Sufi cult, etc.

Al-Jabiri also says:

Our vision of the subject matter is closer to the older view of politics and ethics than to the more modern one that separates these two. It shall espouse the visions of our thinkers that studied *turath* from the perspective of values, ethics and politics, and place itself at a greater distance from modern thinkers and philosophers, at the head of whom we find Machiavelli, for instance.(1)

Al-Jabiri is neither conducting anthropological, psychological or sociological research. Rather, he establishes an analytically historical critique and thus places himself in the midst of a consciously engaged culture to finish two missions: The first is to make a written record of the history of the ethical thought in Arab culture. The second is to begin

a critique of this thought, taken as a vehicle and promoter of negative values, a great number of which still influence contemporary behavior and guide contemporary visions.

I. The Persian Heritage and the Ethics of Submission

The first part of this historical critique is entitled the "Persian Heritage and the Ethics of Submission." Al-Jabiri applies his so-called "Presence and Absence Rule"--more accurately: Why were the ethics of submission absent in Arab culture alone while being present, on the contrary, in Persian culture? Following this same thread, al-Jabiri asks a few more questions on the matter: What urgent need had the Arabs to adopt the Persian system of values at a time when their earliest states were being established, based on a new religion and therefore a new system of values that puts forward piety and good deeds? More importantly, at what time, by which means,

and for what reason have values from Persian culture been transmitted into Arabic culture?

Through which medium was it possible to pave the way for the spread and consecration of the ideology of submission as a new pact binding the governed with a governor who sees in justice not the God-given right to people, but the trait that brings kings a step closer to divination?(2)

How did the newborn Abbasid empire take on the color of the Sasanian empire, or: How did the Arab concept of "emperor" substitute the Persian "emperor" to the writers (Ibn Al Muqaffa', per example) who transferred the emperor's ethics of submission into the new state, using the commanding tones and rhetoric of Arabic language?

Most importantly, what circumstances brought Arab Islamic thought this way and for what mysterious reason was the need so great for an imperial ethics of submission?

Al-Jabiri, troubled by this presence, considered that the imperial discourse of

submission left the first marks on ethics in the Arabic culture. During the reign of Hisham b. Abd al-Malik, the newly formed Umayyad state knew its first crises when opposition to it developed. It was in these times that Persian culture made its first entrance into Arabic culture, before it reached more considerable proportions under the Abbasid state, established on the ashes of the Umayyad lost era.

Al-Jabiri says: What is of interest to us is not the Persian heritage as such, as much as it is its presence in Arabic culture as a political and ethical heritage, bearing the same values that helped shape the ones in Arabic culture.(3) These values were expressed more publicly in the many writings of the eighth century onward, from *Kalila wa Dimna* to al-Ibshihi's *al-Mustatraf fi kull fann Mustazarif*, and including many writings between them, such as Ibn Abd Rabbu's *al-Aqd al-farid*. After meticulous research of these texts and their deeper meanings, al-Jabiri concludes that these ethically precious texts principally revolve

around two basic subjects, with reference to two of the greatest kings of old Iran: Ardashir and Khusrow Anu Shirwan, the two subjects being: religion and kings (perceived as inseparable), submission and justice (obeying the sultan is obeying your God)

Al-Jabiri traces the imperial values of submission, deeply embedded in Arabic culture, and enjoying a privileged, central position, a structural foundation whose influence is unrivaled by any other system of values.(4) He notes, as mentioned above, the rise in espousing imperial values of unconditional submission, despite the fact that the first submission, as mentioned in the Quran, was a conditional one. This rise in the prominence of an imperial culture of submission, vastly promoted by scribes of the state bureaus, which al-Jabiri calls the phenomenon of *al-tarassul* (commissioning), conveyed a holy aura to the principle of submission. Thus was created the link attaching submission to king and empire with that to God. Later on, the concept of

submission was imposed by itself, for itself, since the act prevailed over the subject. With this order on the scale of priority, the king became a God and people slaves, whose bliss reposes upon the sole worship and submission to their king, or rather their despotic king (the more domineering a ruler is, the more rightful it is to obey him).

Following this logic, the Umayyad Caliph turned into a new Khusraw (pre-Islamic Iranian emperor) while Abu Ja'far al-Mansur became later the new state's Ardashir. Oddly enough, putting the act of submission before the subject obeyed and submission as a holy duty, took on a new form, coinciding with the appearance of the concept of the holiness of the Imams in certain groups close to the Shi'ah. These groups replaced Khusraw and his grandeur with the Imam. Conveying a disproportionate importance upon Imams which elevates them from simple humans to gods, as the Persians had done, was unheard of in Arab and earlier Muslim traditions. Still, the Shi'i and, more precisely, the Isma'ili Imamate

ideology revolves around the Imam as the holder of the secrets of religion, the rightful heir to prophecy or even God, who partially, or entirely, took a human form. To obey him then is to obey God.(5) This concept passed also into Sunni Islam, and the same concept turned Ardashir's city--the old and new Arab cities headed by a despotic king--into cities devoid of dreams. Al-Jabiri says: A Khusraw city is one that renders this world dreamless.(6)

Over many years, dating from his "Contemporary Arabic Discourse", al-Jabiri was haunted by the Taoist concept of the "just despot," present between the lines of contemporary Arab political discourse, a concept that has prevented the correct discussion of the subject of joint authority and democracy. Throughout the course that eventually led to the ethical Arab mind, al-Jabiri uncovers this Ardashir-like discourse and calls upon us to abolish it, because so long as Ardashir is not buried, we shall not revive.

II. The Greek Heritage and the Ethics of Happiness

As al-Jabiri sees it, the first Abbasid era was one of cross-cultural competition and bragging, where different cultures worked hard to demonstrate its noble provenance and superiority, as well as to praise its values and heritage.

The main competition, bordering on conflict, was concentrated at first between an Arab Islamic heritage on one side and a Persian heritage on the other. Those loyal to the latter, who worked toward its promotion, were known as the *shu'biyah* or "populists." This competition took place mainly in the time period extending from the middle of the second to the middle of the third Islamic century. No sooner had the second part of the third century dawned than the cross-cultural competition was freed from its popular mould (Arabs vs. *Ajam*, or "foreigners") and evolved into a cultural "showoff" of which the two main actors were the partisans of Persian culture, in favor of despotism, on one side, and

the partisans of Greek culture, favoring happiness and the ways to create it, on the other side. By the fourth Islamic century, the Arabic character of "Arabs vs. *Ajam*" was replaced by "Arabs and Muslims" fused into one, since Islam, above all other religions, became the Arabs' faith, while Islam as a culture was espoused, as opposed to both the Persian and the Greek cultures.

Al-Jabiri considers that there is a difference in the quest for values between the Persian cultural heritage on one hand and the Greek one on the other. While in Persian culture, the values of submission were for political purposes, the knowledgeable ethical quest was historically related, on the Greek shore, to philosophy, envisioning the universe, and not to building an empire. Moreover, the state that required submission in Greek philosophical discourse was neither an empire, nor a sultanate. It was a city, not an empire, headed by an emperor, nor a kingdom, headed by a king. Besides, it was not a mere local space, but was related to the citizen, who was

the main focus of it, which is why the city-state is considered to be, above all, a gathering of citizens.

From this point on, al-Jabiri pursues Greek influences on the Islamic cultural heritage, examining the essays of the Arab philosophers al-Kindi, Ibn Rushd, al-Farabi's and his *al-Madinah al-fadilah* [The Virtuous City] and Ibn Miskawayh and his *Tahthib al-akhlaq* [Shaping Ethics]. This culminates in the scholar al-Jabiri calls *muthaqqaf al-muqabassat* [the epitome of the intellectuals], from the fourth Islamic century: Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi, writer of *al-Maqamat*. Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi might be the best example of them of these philosophers who, along with Ibn Miskawayh, are grouped together with and assimilated to his their fellow *muthaqqafun*.(7)

It is at this point that al-Jabiri brings us to a radical turn or events: Greek culture, secretly battling Persian culture, under the guise of cultural competition, began to make peace with its opponent--a reconciliation that led to a union spoken of by al-Amiri and Ibn

Miskawayh, a union between Persian and Greek, ineluctably leading to the coming together of their two central values: despotism and happiness. In a later stage, the political ethical literature in Islam, nurtured by Greek culture, removed happiness from the equation; it was either mentioned as the faraway promise of the Hereafter, or in this lifetime the attribute linked to the Ardashir prototype of a despotic ruler, who appears as the guardian of the faith, while in reality, he is the guardian of his rule from the faith [i.e. the people].

This is the window through which the ethics of Khusraw show themselves yet again. The philosopher intellectuals, who have chosen the worst of the Greek heritage, will translate them well. Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi says in one of his reworded texts:

"The Sultan is to the organization of the matters of his Empire as the Sun is to the division of Time and the Soldiers are like the wind is to pollenization. The

scientists are like the flora, the animals used to transport funds like the Earth that carries the beasts with all the good they bring to man."

Al-Jabiri remarks, with a touch of humor, that if we were to substitute the sun for God, it all comes together clearly, a comparison between the ruler over people on earth and the ruler over the heavens and earth above, adding that this comparison inspires values, and acts as the platform upon which they are raised up and consecrated in Arab Islamic culture.(8)

III. The Sufi Cultural Heritage: The Ethics of Annihilation and the Effacement of Ethics

Al-Jabiri had previously made his prejudiced, ideological stand on the Sufi Cultural Heritage known through his *Buniyat al-aql al-Arabi* [Structure of the Arabic Mind (1986)], when he was researching Gnosticism. Al-Jabiri asserted that the Gnostic revelation

cannot be placed above the mind, as the "Gnostics" claim, but rather it lies beneath the efficient intellect.(9) To al-Jabiri, the Gnostic truth is nothing short of a magical vision of the world, deepened by myth. This magical vision is the core substance of Gnosticism as both a perspective and theory, thus concluding that Gnosticism annihilates the mind.

Al-Jabiri believes that the Sufi cultural heritage, as a live embodiment of the righteousness of the mind, appeared during the decadent period of Arab culture, becoming a symbol for its ailments and waning fortunes. He nevertheless remarks, in *Buniyat al-aql al-Arabi*, that Sufi culture reached its peak during the age of the bloom of the young Arab culture. Al-Jabiri searched deep within Sufi culture to find out the cause. He asked a myriad of questions to form a critique of different intellectual approaches, trying to define the essential problematic of the intellect. He also sought to stimulate his readers so they could follow him along the exuberant intellectual and ideological paths of

his mind: When, in what way, and for what reason did this heritage appear in the Arabic culture? What is its source? When, how, and why did this influence, with its negativity-ridden values on life take on such an importance in the Arab culture, from its beginnings through the *futuh* [conquests] that made of Arab culture a global culture at that time.(10) Al-Jabiri pursues his inquiry to the point of saying that it is not normal for negative stands on life, such as these, to appear in a young culture that is still reaping the fruits of its conquests and turning into a global culture.

Al-Jabiri leads us to the conclusion that just as the ethics of submission were strangers to both the pure Arab and Islamic cultures, the Sufi cultural heritage--a consecration of the ethics of submission through the ties linking the *sheikh* [master] to the *murid* [disciple], or even those between the kings of the afterlife with their slaves and disciples--was a stranger to pure Arab culture. He adds a subsequent conclusion, which might not need lengthy

explaining since history and texts prove it: The ethics of annihilation, and more so annihilation itself, are far removed from the ethics of life as set forth by the Quran, the Prophet's conduct, his Sunnah, and by the different practices of worship and worldly behaviour of the Prophet's followers. Adding to this is that the mere idea of annihilation is contrary to the doctrine of *tawhid* [unity] present in the Quran, of which a simplified definition states that it is the opposite of *shirk* [associating something else with God], whether it meant including a partner, or oneself. The *tawhid* of Islam means that God is one and cannot be compared to any other thing, an indication of a limitless distance that can never be crossed.

The Sufis seek to bestow upon *tawhid* or *ittihad* [unity] or *wahda* [singularity], all of which include annihilation, a meaning that is not given to them in Islam. This meaning is even unknown to the Arabs in pre-Islamic times who had established a distance between themselves and God that eliminates all

medium of contact with him, even through prayer and worship, if not through stone idols.(11) This is why al-Jabiri rejects the late Sunni exegesis that links Sufism to Islamic law. The saying that considers Sufism to be a necessary result from the heart of Islamic law is a late Sunni attempt to legitimize its standing. Al-Jabiri asks how, if the idea of Annihilation neither originates in the pure Islamic culture, nor in pure Arab culture, both the idea and the ethics of annihilation cannot be foreign inputs that entered either with Persian or Greek culture.

Al-Jabiri admits that Greek culture had experiences shared with Sufism and the ethics of annihilation. Nevertheless, he links the spread of Sufi culture to Persian culture, that is, to al-Jabiri, the bearer of all sins, problems and dysfunctionalities of the Arab Mind. Al-Jabiri perceives Sufism as essentially Gnosticism and not knowledge.(12)

A more alarming fact is that the Shi‘i-Sufi Gnosticism bears the same Khusraw traits that are obvious in the dominance of the

Khusraw-like values that characterize the sheikh-murid relationship. This aspect enabled Sufi Gnosticism to make a sweeping entry as absolute Sufism, or Sunni Sufism, and to create a spiritual empire throughout the whole of the Islamic world. This empire placed itself in the position of being the right and true replacement of the state of the Sunni people. The Shi'ah did not have a place in this spiritual Sufi empire since their own state was originally a spiritual empire.(13)

Al-Jabiri apparently, then, attributes the spread of Sufism during the golden age of the Arab culture to a Persian Sufi heritage, widespread in Kufa and Basrah, the two cultural capitals of Iraq before the founding of Baghdad. If we take into consideration that the majority of the inhabitants of these two cities were Persian, bitter for being ruled by Arabs when they were known as "the free," then it should be expected for Sufism to appear in this context. This manifestation is both a sign to a communal, political piety after being defeated by Arabs, and also a weapon that Persians

used against Arabs to destroy them after they were unable to face them. Instead, the Arabs chose the path of defeat and espoused beliefs in mystic powers. Al-Jabiri cites the views of specialists of Persian history, although not numerous. Al-Jabiri comments on the piety of the inhabitants of Kufa, saying that they abandoned politics to the extent that their piety transformed into Sufism, a Sufism nurtured by the Hermetic and Persian Sufi heritage. Not content with the conspiracy view that considers this espousal a part of the Persian conspiracy against Arabs, al-Jabiri furthers his inquiry by pointing out that the first Sufis, were Persian, from Habib al-Ajami al-Farisi, to Ibrahim b. Adham and so on.

My own standpoint is that although al-Jabiri's thorough research in the cultural heritage of Sufism deserves examining, being a pioneer work in its search for the infiltrations for the Khusraw values into this heritage, research is still lacking in this field-e.g., on the "production of meaning," which is richly illustrated in the Sufi cultural heritage.

Research also needs to be conducted on the history of Sufi thought, but research removed from plainly descriptive and impressionist studies which are already available, on the ideology that links this heritage with the conspiratory mentality, as well as on its nature as the living expression of the imperial values that became widely present in both the Arab and Islamic facets of a pure Arabic culture.

We are inclined to adopt the conclusion al-Jabiri reached, seeing the ethics of annihilation as ethics of no labor, relying by principle on leaving management and not thinking of the future. It is thus not in the least bit strange to see that the spread of Sufism in the Arab and Muslim world, since the days of al-Ghazali, led people to cease thinking of the future and planning for it. They considered the Christian Crusades as a punishment from God because Muslims had strayed from the divine path. This is also the opinion of some modern Sufis regarding the plight of the Palestinian people. The reality of the matter is that not

only do ethics of annihilation eliminate ethics, but they also bring about the end of nations.

Iv. The Pure Arab cultural heritage and the ethics of chivalry

In his research on pure Arab culture, al-Jabiri stops at chivalry, which he considers to be the pivotal value of Arab culture. He studies actual chivalry and, more importantly, the position chivalry occupies as an ethical and social value from pre-Islamic to contemporary times, with particular focus on the Umayyad era when Persian culture and its values were spreading, either by direct influence or as a reaction against it. Throughout his research on the sources of ethics and values in the Pure Arab culture, al-Jabiri uses Arabic literature as his main resource. He classifies those under three categories:

1. That which relies on the literature of the self, as expressed in the '*Uyun al-akhbar*' by Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 AH).
2. That which is a combination of the literature of the self and rhetoric, like the '*Mufdiliyyat*' by al-Mufaddal al-Dabbi (d. 168 AH).
3. That which relies on rhetoric in prose and poetry, such as '*al-Kamil*' by al-Mubrad (d. 285 AH).

Al-Jabiri does not concentrate his attention on the authenticity of these sources, since this is not where his interest lies, but he does add the following:

No matter how much truth these writings bear, what concerns us is to identify the degree of existence and influence of the values borne by the heritage attributed to the Jahiliyya era upon the Arabic Mind,

as was inscribed in the documentation era [al-Tadwin] in 496 AH.

As mentioned above, al-Jabiri reflects on chivalry as a central value in aristocratic Arabic ethics, since it is also the central value in Arabic belles-lettres. He adds that since the aristocracy was extremely attached to its Arab aspect of its culture, it is not unlikely for the aristocracy to have made of chivalry an Arabic heritage of the pre-Islamic era, one that expresses Arabic ethics before and after Islam, as being the right ethics of conduct in the world. The novelty is that al-Jabiri takes chivalry from its position as part of noble ethics and Arab virtue encompassing outer and inner beings, to another position: chivalry as a concept inherent in the Arab nation. Furthermore, chivalry continued to represent, from the Umayyad era to modern times, the higher value without which the virtuous Arab city fails. In my opinion, this assertion that chivalry is essential to the constitution of the

virtuous Arab city underlies three goals al-Jabiri seeks to attain:

First, when al-Jabiri links accomplishing the virtuous city with chivalry, he openly and tacitly links ethics and politics in the Arab city. This is most true when western political culture from Machiavelli to contemporary Arab intellectuals, who have chosen to walk on precarious roads and justify all the mistakes of Arab political authority, separates ethics and politics. At this point, al-Jabiri shows his inclination towards the old vision that links ethics to politics (i.e., politics as it should be). In this fashion, he breaks with the modern view that separates them, the view adopted by the guardians of the new order, since the ethical system is in the end one for politics as a way to manage the community.

Secondly, and most importantly too, is to say that Arab culture is free of the ethics of submission on which the state of great dissensions rises. This is where al-Jabiri applies what he calls the rule of absence and presence, i.e. why are the ethics of submission

present in Persian culture that was to later conquer the field of the Arab culture, while they were absent from pure Arab culture?

It is no secret that al-Jabiri sees no possibility of a *Nahda*, or revival of the nation unless it sets aside the Khusraw values that have immortalized the state of great dissensions by arguing that it seeks to avoid dissension. This is what al-Jabiri seeks to prove in his conclusion. His research on chivalry and noble ethics is motivated by how it might facilitate separation with the imperial values of the Khusraw. For this reason he concludes his book by calling for a burial of Ardashir (the founder of the Sasanian state) and his regime, a figure whose ethics of submission were to be veiled with appearance of Islam. Al-Jabiri also pays tribute to the pioneer revivalists who honored chivalry and sought to revive it.

Al-Jabiri means to express a crisis that is sweeping contemporary Arab society. To extract themselves from this crisis, Arab society must make a separation with Ardashir

values and return to the noblest of ethics (i.e., piety and chivalry). It is good advice that al-Jabiri advances in his project critiquing logical Arab thought. This advice, nevertheless, if correct, is nothing more than a one-legged ideology running alongside the culture of globalization that Thomas Freidman compares to a four-wheel-drive Lexus. Who will be ahead in this race and who will win in the globalization era? This is one question to which al-Jabiri gives no answer.

V. Islamic Heritage: The Ethics of Religion

Delving repeatedly into pure Islamic culture, al-Jabiri cites four of the most prominent Muslim jurists. In the case of one jurist, al-Harith b. Asad al-Mahasibi, al-Jabiri stops at the ethical crisis that this jurist experienced, a crisis which led him to look toward religious ethics, the basis for preparation for the afterlife, a shared opinion between himself and al-Ghazali.

Al-Jabiri stops to wonder: Is Islam not a religion and a life code? This is the point that was overlooked by al-Mahasibi, according to al-Jabiri, who immediately "jumps" over to al-Mawardi, who gave this point the requisite attention when he started writing about ethics and, more specifically, manners of conduct. Al-Mawardi's essays were part of his "Islamization" of ethics; his writing was considered to be a new step in this genre of writing. Assessing the works of al-Mawardi, al-Jabiri says: Through his writing, al-Mawardi was outlining a project to form Muslim ethics. Whether or not this project was a real representation that deserved the name it bore is a hard point to defend.

Al-Jabiri then moves on to the case of al-Isfahani, and his attempts to highlight the qualities of the Shi'ah, finally reaching al-Ghazali, whose book, *Ihya 'ulum al-din* [Revival of the Sciences of Religion]—a controversial work--that he considered to be jurisprudence not only in the are of *fiqh* [law], but also in all science and knowledge fields.

Al-Jabiri says: "When I first introduced the outline of the book project, during a lecture I gave about four years ago [1997], I had not covered all the possible references. I lacked books of *turath* that could be considered as a real representation of pure Islamic culture, in the field of ethics. Despite the fact that I had not conducted an in-depth study of the works we spoke of in the two previous chapters, the thorough study of these books lead me to believe that that none of them truly represented the ethics that are really those of the only pure Islamic culture, [taking into account that its basis is the Quran]. Having had an up close and long contact with the Quran, be it through my works or outside of them, I have come to consider spontaneously that the central value in the ethics of the Holy book is the good deed." (14)

Al-Jabiri goes on to explain the concept of piety as the central value in pure Islamic culture. He thinks that belief in Islam was always coupled with the good deed—"The believers and those who have done good

deeds"-- repeatedly mentioned. Al-Jabiri then draws the conclusion that the good deed is the center of Islamic Quranic values. When belief and the good deed are combined, they produce other religious values, seen as the noblest in all religions: piety. Al-Jabiri writes:

The contexts in which it figured all indicate that it is not merely a virtue relating the believer to God, it is also one that goes out in the direction of others, of the people. Piety being a centre place value in all religions, the particularity of Islam is that piety is founded by the good deed. It is obvious then that while piety is the central value in Islam, like in any other religion, the good deed is the central ethical value related to the Islamic ethics. For this reason, these ethics should be called the ethics of the good deed.(15)

Al-Jabiri asserts that the Arab and Islamic cultures almost completely lack research and writings on the ethics of chivalry and the good deed, i.e., truly Arab and Islamic ethics. One exception in this shortage is the work of the Faqih al-Izz Abdul al-Salam al-Shafi'i, born in Damascus in 577 AH.

In terms that touch on the central influence of Morocco that Arabs from further East often complain about, al-Jabiri confirms that al-Izz Abdul al-Salam was of Moroccan origin. He prefers to refer to his writings *Qawa'id al-ahkam fi manazil al-anam* and his book *Shajart al ma'arif wa al-ahwal wa salih al aqwal wa al- 'amal* [The Tree of Knowledge and States, the Good Word and Deed]. To al-Jabiri, al-Izz's book on ethics, *Akhlaq al-Qur'an al-karim bi-itta'kid* [The Certain Ethics of the Quran], was an authentic study of the ethics of the good deed.

Al-Jabiri's assessment of the book reads:

This is where Ibn Abd al-Salam's importance shows. He broke free of the tightness of the *fiqh*, rhetoric and the temptation of Islamization: Islamization of the Persian manners [al-Mawardi], that of the greek ethics [al-Raguib al-Isfahani], and that of the Hermetic manners of conduct [al-Ghazali]. He has surpassed all of these and went back to the origins, to the Quran. He read "... " as a whole, and understood religion as belief and good deeds, just as the Quran demands frequently.

In this environment it was natural that the Shari'ah politics insert itself, politics whose foundations are the best interest of the ruler and the ruled at once, in the same ethical field: The ethics of best interest.(16)

Al-Jabiri concludes with one demand: To bury Ardashir. So long as the Arabs and Muslims

don't bury their artificial ancestor, Ardashir,
they will not revive.

[1]- Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri, *al- 'Aql al-ikhlaqi al-Arabi* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wahdah al-Arabiyah, 2001), 58, 428.

2- Ibid, 243.

3- Ibid, 153.

4- Ibid, 227.

5- Ibid, 231.

6- Ibid, 254.

7- Ibid, 257.

8- Ibid, 420.

9- Al-Jabiri, *Buniyat al-aql al-Arabi*, 378.

10- Al-Jabiri, *al-Aql al-ikhlaqi al-Arabi*, 430.

11- Ibid, 409.

12- Ibid, 441.

13- Ibid, 455.

14- Ibid, 592.

15- Ibid, 594.

16- Ibid, 620.