

The Islamic Ritual of Hajj: Ancient Cosmology and Spirituality, **by Al-Lehaibi S. Majed**

Abstract

Hajj, an annual pilgrimage to Mecca, can be understood within the cyclical nature of ancient cosmology. The sun or light is the Platonic symbol of knowledge and a sign of the life-giving force of God; the light is also the Aristotelian unmoved mover that sets everything in motion just by being desired and sought after. This paper comes to see these symbols as part of the religious ritual of Hajj, with the Ka'aba, the shrine of God, representing the sun and God's immanence, and the people representing the celestial spheres moved by love and desire to go in a circular cosmic manner around it. Further, this eternal circular motion (attributed to the celestial spheres) implies that time is a regenerative process and death itself is a transitional state leading to a higher and purer form.

This paper will focus on Hajj as a key ritual in the Islamic tradition. The article attempts to understand its metaphysical significance as it relates to Christianity and in the light of the western philosophical tradition stemming from Plato's philosophy and its Aristotelian derivatives. The latter supports, at least to some extent, Christian and Islamic traditions in understanding and answering questions about ultimate reality and in explaining such issues as dualism (the essence of spirituality), wherein human beings consist of both body and soul. Thus, this paper will reflect on the spirituality of Hajj from a philosophical perspective attempting to answer questions about the nature of Divine, the nature of the human self, the nature of the universe, and the point of intersection of holy time and holy place at which believers are given access to the Divine.

Philosophical and Theoretical Background

For Aristotle, science's purpose was to save the phenomenon, "to reveal the causes that are responsible for the [observed natural] phenomena."¹ He believed the one material that makes up everything in the natural world is a universal element that has no quality—prime matter. Aristotle explains in his *Physics* that matter is not important; what is important is the form in which the matter is put together. The form is the quality of things, but the prime matter remains unchanged. Change is the replacement of one form by another. For Aristotle, the world is dynamic; the only constant is change. Change is a movement in the continuum of quality, a movement from potentiality to actuality: cold water is potentially hot and actually cold. In heating it up, the potential of the water is actualized. Nature, *phusis*, is what comes to be the ultimate actualization of the potential of things.² Aristotle notes in *Physics* that natural objects have an internal principle of motion that propels them towards their final causes:

- A. Locomotion, which involves moving or changing from one point or place to another.
- B. Motion of quality: Change of form (childhood to adulthood to old age), (an acorn to a tree)
- C. Motion of quantity: Change of size.³

Additionally, in Aristotelian cosmology, the earth is at the center of the cosmos and immobile. The celestial bodies move around the earth, carried by the motions of crystal spheres arranged concentrically around the earth. The highest sphere contains the fixed stars. The others spheres are responsible for the motions of the seven planets, the sun, and the moon. The universe is divided by the sphere of the moon, the closest sphere to the earth, into two distinct universes. Below the moon, Lloyd explains in *Early Greek Science*, is the terrestrial, or sublunary, realm. It is a dynamic world of constant change. This realm of nature is where things are made up of the four elements—earth, water, air, and fire—in their natural places. Earth and water are heavy, so they fall to the center of the cosmos. Fire and air are light, so they rise to the sphere of the moon. These four elements have natural motion towards their natural places.⁴ As Lindberg explains in *The Beginnings of Western Science*:

Aristotle considered this eternal universe to be a great sphere, divided into an upper and a lower region by the spherical shell in which the moon is situated. Above the moon is the celestial region; below is the terrestrial region; the moon, spatially intermediate, is also of intermediate nature. The terrestrial or sublunar region is characterized by birth, death, and transient change of all kinds; the celestial or supralunar region, by contrast, is a region of eternally unchanging cycles.⁵

Above the sphere of the moon is the celestial or superlunary realm. There is no change in this realm; it is eternal. The heavens are not made of the four elements, because then they would be out of their natural places.⁶ Rather, the heavens are composed of the fifth element (aether), which is eternal and homogeneous. As Lindberg notes, “The celestial region is completely filled with this quintessence and divided into concentric spherical shells bearing the planets. It had, for Aristotle, a superior, quasi-divine status.”⁷ Thus, the celestial objects are spherical and demonstrate a circular motion that is perfect, continuous, eternal, and predicible.

In *On the Soul*, Aristotle proposes the idea, which he shares with Plato, that everything is moved by the soul.⁸ For Aristotle, there are three levels of the soul in the sub-lunar world:

1. The nutritive soul belongs to plants, where they can nourish themselves and reproduce.
2. Animals, by contrast, are higher than plants because they have the ability to move, perceive and process outside stimuli in a higher order than plants.
3. Then, there are human beings, who “share with the gods the possession of reason, but with the other animals [and plants] the possession of his other vital faculties, such as sensation, nutrition and reproduction.”⁹ But man has a dimension of soul that lower beings do not have, the ability to think.

For Aristotle, part of the *telos* of being human is to transcend our animality. For him, humans are suspended between being animals and being gods, or part of the divine soul.

While the world’s soul, for Plato, is inside the universe, the Aristotelian first mover is located outside the physical universe, and this for Aristotle is God. The first mover moves the universe by the force of love, being loved, desired, and thus chased after eternally in a circular motion. Lindberg explains:

The motion of the celestial spheres . . . must be natural rather than forced. The cause of this eternal motion must itself be unmoved, for if we do not postulate an unmoved mover, we quickly find ourselves trapped in an infinite regress: a moving mover must have acquired its motion from yet another moving mover, and so on. Aristotle identified the unmoved mover for the planetary spheres as the “Prime Mover,” a living deity representing the highest good, wholly actualized, totally absorbed in self-contemplation, nonspatial, separated from the spheres it (or he or she) moves. . . . That is, the Prime Mover is the object of desire for the celestial spheres, which endeavor to imitate its changeless perfection by assuming eternal, uniform circular motions.¹⁰

Lloyd also explains, “The primary cause on which the universe depends and from which all movement is ultimately derived is an Unmoved Mover which is said to bring about movement as the final cause, as the good that is the object of desire and love.”¹¹ If an object moves, there is something that moves it. If every cause of every movement were itself moving, then the regress of causes would have to go on infinitely. But, in the Aristotelian finite universe, this regress must stop. There must be a cause of movement that does not itself move, and therefore, which is not itself moved. In this paradigm, the

outer sphere moves to move the others. The outer sphere is moved by love. That is to say, the outer sphere desires to come closer to the first mover, but because it moves in a circular fashion, it keeps getting closer to it by chasing after it infinitely. In this cosmology, love is what keeps the universe in motion.¹²

Interestingly, the Aristotelian world view is clearly expressed in Signorelli's fresco "The Last Judgment and the Resurrection of the Dead" located in the Orvieto Cathedral. Although it was painted very early in the Renaissance, this painting clearly depicts a medieval ideology of space and time. The first two elements of medieval space displayed here are dualism and hierarchy. We see the celestial world and the terrestrial world. The celestial world looks spherical, which represents the circular motion of the spheres and the sense of eternity that this motion produces. The upper part of the celestial world is painted gold, a sign of ultimate perfection, and is filled with holes, that is, stars.¹³ This outermost sphere of fixed stars moves in a perfect circle. The angels inhabit the lower part of the celestial world. The background is painted a cloud-like white, and, with this same pigment of white, child-like angels are painted. This white material represents the fifth element that composes the eternal objects of the celestial realm. In this realm, nothing can be fragmented and everything is eternal and unchanging; everything is beyond suffering and change, and nothing can possibly affect it. We also see two angels of the apocalypse blowing their trumpets. They appear strong and young, unaffected by time and change. The upper realm of this fresco, which represents the heavens, is completely balanced and orderly. It is partitioned into the upper and lower heavens by a vertical line. It is also balanced by the two angels, which give the illusion that the weight is equal on either side of the upper part of the fresco.

The painting compels us to move our eyes from the Divine, and the angels to the bottom of the hierarchy, farther away from the light of God, to the darkest, most external edge of the cosmos. As opposed to the beautiful, orderly, and predictable motion of heavens, on earth there is transient, erratic back and forth motion. In the terrestrial realm, the cloud-like material becomes the earth. And, out of the earth, people are emerging. They are scattered all over the place. This realm is where the element of time enters the picture, where things can change, decay, and die, and life is constantly in flux.

In this painting, the hierarchy is arranged from God at the top to humans at the bottom (this is similar to the Aristotelian hierarchy). This hierarchy shows that space is finite, ending beyond the stars, and gives a clear sense of direction: up and down. Up is the direction of God, the ultimate good, and down is the farthest away from this supreme good, which makes it evil. In the painting, we see the people who are resurrected looking up, symbolizing that every soul desires reunion with the Divine. As a figure of the Italian high Renaissance, Signorelli reflected in his painting the period's fascination with Neo-Platonist thought.¹⁴ As such, Signorelli demonstrated symbolism

of Christianized Platonism, reflected by the early Christian thinkers such as Origen of Alexandria who put forth the idea that humans began their existence as disembodied souls in the heavens contemplating eternal truths. However, some of these souls got tired; therefore, they fell and mixed with filth, with bodies. Origen wrote in *On the First Principles*:

I have heard people maintain that the life of the soul did not begin when the soul was joined to the body; there were souls alive, they say, and grouped in nations in a world of their own before that Yielding to a sort of inclination towards evil, they lose their wings and come to have bodies. They afterward return by the same stages and are restored to the heavenly regions . . . there is thus a kind of cycle, perpetually passing through the same stages; the soul never settles in any one state forever.¹⁵

Thus, the initial fall of unwise souls led to the cycles of rebirth, death, and transmigration. This cyclical process is a kind of remedial discipline so that the soul purifies itself through a graded series of re-embodiments. The goal is to escape from corporeal existence and to return to the disembodied state of pure soul. And, at the end of those cycles, there will be a restoration of all things. Everything will return to its pure, original, and good state. As Malaty and Hamlin note: “Origen’s doctrine of the pre-existence of souls is connected with his idea of a universal restoration. At the end, death will be conquered and all souls, even demons, will be saved. All rational creatures will be equal at the end [suggesting a sense of universalism].”¹⁶ Origen referred to this end as “*Apokatastasis*,” which means restoration to the original condition.¹⁷ The notion of the final restoration of all ultimately gives us an egocentric view of the universe, where everything is about humans, and the purpose of the universe is the rehabilitation and re-education of souls that have fallen.

Moreover, in the painting, the only connection between the celestial realm and the terrestrial realm is the apocalyptic angels blowing their elongated trumpets and pointing in the direction of the terrestrial realm. This shows that the universe has a plan and the time of its fulfilling is depicted in the fresco: the end of time when the dead are resurrected. In the frame painted around this fresco, there are little holes or medallions in which the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles can be seen, leaning out and looking at the fresco to watch the dissolution of the world that he theorized.¹⁸ Clearly, later Christians found Empedocles of interest because of his view of the end of the world, the chaos and dissolving of the world that is shown in this painting.

Time for Empedocles is cyclical. To illustrate: Empedocles, Danielson noted, was the first to conceive of the four elements—earth, water, air, and fire—as “the four roots of physical reality.”¹⁹ They are, Lloyd explains, “eternal and uncreated: they are, then,

eternal in the sense of original substances. And secondly, they—together with Love and Strife which are responsible for mixing and separating them—are what everything else in the world is made of.”²⁰ That is to say, change occurs when the elements mix together to create a form. Then, later, that form falls apart, separates, and recombines to form something else. So, the elements remain; they neither go into being nor out of being. However, the individual object or form resulting from their mixtures dissolves. The elements combine and separate because

...there are two forces, strife and love, existed in the past and will exist in the future; nor will boundless time, I believe, ever be empty of the pair. Now one prevails, now the other, each in its appointed turn, as change goes incessantly on its course. These alone truly are, but interpenetrating one another they become men and tribes of beasts. At one time they are brought about by love to form a single order, at another they are carried off in different directions by the repellent force of strife; then in course of time their enmity is subdued and they all come into harmony once more. Thus in the respect that by nature they grow out of many into one, then divide from one into many, they are changing things and their life is not lasting, but in respect of their perpetual cycle of change they are unalterable and eternal. As things came together in harmony, Strife withdrew to the outermost region. In that condition neither can the sun's swift limbs be distinguished, nor shaggy mighty earth, nor the sea; because all things are brought so close together in the perfect circularity of the sphere...When, in the fullness of time set by the primordial oath, strife had grown to greatness in the limbs [of the sphere] and was flaunting his demands for honors and privileges...then all of God's limbs in turn began to quake.²¹

Again, we see the idea of love as the source of order. To Empedocles, at the beginning of the universe, the four elements were separate and the power of love brought them together; they combine and generate the world. And, at some point, strife is going to gain the upper hand over love, the universe will collapse (as shown in the fresco above), and the elements will return to their original places. Then, the whole process will begin again.

This conception of cyclical time is derived from simple observation. Traditional people, according to Eliade's *Cosmos and History*, saw time as cyclical. As Eliade explains, “there is no question of seeing in this an imitation of nature, which also undergoes periodic regeneration, ‘beginning anew’ each spring, with each spring recovering all its powers intact.”²² The basis of this understanding is simply the

awareness of a natural pattern as observed in the seasons of the year. The seasons repeatedly recur, from spring to summer and fall. There is a period of degeneration in winter and then a new rebirth; a recurrence of the entire cycle once again. This same repetition can also be observed in the cycles of the moon, which waxes and wanes, dies, and reappears, only to be born again a few days later. Eliade observed that, through his belief in the cyclical conception of time, traditional man attempts to make his suffering bearable. It is his way to continue living despite the psychological terror of history. Explaining how the traditional man's abolition of history is a defense mechanism against sufferings and catastrophes of his life, Eliade writes:

[The traditional man] is free to be no longer what he was, free to annul his own history through periodic abolition of time and collective regeneration...We know that the archaic and traditional societies granted freedom each year to begin a new, a "pure" existence, with virgin possibilities...At least he retains the freedom to annul his faults, to wipe out the memory of his "fall into history," and to make another attempt to escape definitively from time.²³

Application and Interpretation

The circular motion of the sphere animated by love and desire to be closer to the Divine and the seven planets that move around the Earth, as well as the concept of cyclical time, found its way into a very important ritual of the Islamic faith. In the centre of the town of Makkah in Saudi Arabia, there is a small square building of stones called the Ka'aba, the shrine of God. It is believed that God ordained Adam (and later Abraham) to build it exactly beneath the House in Heaven where angels worship and contemplate God—"Baitul Ma'amoor" or the celestial house of God.²⁴ The Quran refers to this shrine in several places:

We made the House a resort and a sanctuary for people, saying, 'Take the spot where Abraham stood as your place of prayer.' We commanded Abraham and Ishmael: 'Purify My House for those who walk round it, those who stay there, and those who bow and prostrate themselves in worship.' Abraham said, 'My Lord, make this land secure and provide with produce those of its people who believe in God and the Last Day.' God said, 'As for those who disbelieve, I will grant them enjoyment for a short while and then subject them to the torment of the Fire—an evil destination.' As Abraham and Ishmael built up the foundations of the House [they prayed], 'Our Lord, accept [this] from us. You are the All Hearing, the All Knowing.'²⁵

It is towards this building that all Muslims turn their faces during prayer. Also, they go to the Ka'aba once a year as pilgrims to perform the ritual of Hajj, where they glorify God. Eliade referred to this rite as a journey to the center. A journey to Makkah is a journey back to the center, the starting point of the Islamic faith, and, at the same time, it is an internal journey where the human being leaves behind the physical, material world to focus on the soul, the spirit; it is, in Eliade's words, a journey "to the self, to the 'center' of [one's] being."²⁶ On a different level, from the Aristotelian perspective, it is a journey from the terrestrial realm to the celestial, "from chaos to cosmos."²⁷ Going back to the center is going back to one's origin, to one's spiritual home.

This journey to the center reminds people of and recalls them to their heavenly origin, which they must return to after being caught up in the trappings of the material world.²⁸ This is a form of love where people long to get back to their original state. Thus, this symbolic performance of people in motion around the Ka'aba provides one with the beatific vision of ultimate happiness, which is now but a potential state for the individual soul. In Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, God is the object of desire and practices only the activity of thinking; the object of God's thought is itself. Since one identifies with the object of his or her thought, God is "intelligence intelligizing itself."²⁹ According to the Aristotelian hierarchical universe, God does not think of anything lower than Himself; it is debasing to God to think of lower things or beings.

The human is higher than the other forms of life, because human beings share with God this activity of thought, and the object of human thought is something higher than itself. God is the object of human desire, thought, and contemplation. In such contemplation, humans identify with God and find the real happiness that only exists in heaven (which exists literally in the celestial realm). Heaven is the natural place of the soul; the soul is miserable in bodies on earth, because it exists outside of its natural place.³⁰ Humans can find happiness in thinking of and identifying with God. And with thought or ritual, human beings identify with God and look forward to a final reunification with God.³¹ So, in the ritual of Hajj, there is a performance of the potentiality of souls and mimicry of the eternal harmonious motion of the heavens moving around the object of their desire. Hajj, like all religious rituals, offers its disciples remedial education to help them purify themselves from worldly attachment in order to reunify with God.

In a sense, the pilgrims' motion around the Ka'aba reflects Platonic and Aristotelian spirituality. In the spirituality of the "Allegory of the Cave," the Cave represents this world—namely, the world we experience through the senses.³² Any attempt to acquire knowledge of the transcendent or real world and of God through the senses is doomed to failure as the senses link us to the depravity of this world whereas knowledge of God—or the world of the forms—is based purely upon the spirit. To be

liberated from this cave is to break free from our reliance upon the flesh and its senses, so we are able to see through our mind's eye. Hence, the ascent from the cave is a detachment from this world to enable the soul to ascend to the other world, which culminates in the beatific vision of ultimate happiness when one intellectually and spiritually experiences the true world of being (i.e., the Platonic forms).

In a similar way, when they come to Mecca, pilgrims leave behind the world of constant change and ultimate death and go towards a world of eternity and true being. This represents the Platonic idea of leaving behind the world, the world of shadows seeking the source of light. During the Hajj, people leave all their material possessions except for a white sheet of cloth with which they cover their bodies. In this ritual, they go around the Ka'aba seven times in a counter-clockwise movement, contemplating and glorifying the Divine. People represent the gold that mixed with filth, the fallen souls into bodies, and they seek purification by contemplating the ultimate good. The Ka'aba, in Aristotelian terms, resembles the unmoved mover. People, acting out of desire and love, move around the Ka'aba in complete circles while it sits still.

Notably, this movement also resembles the heliocentric movement of the solar system. The pilgrims' movement around the Ka'aba once a year suggests the movement of Earth and the rest of the planets around the sun.³³ Pilgrims go around the Ka'aba seven times; the perfect circular movement that was attributed to the celestial realm is now symbolically performed on the terrestrial realm. It signifies that everything has a cyclical pattern: everything starts at a point and ends at the starting point to start again. The reason people come to perform Hajj in the house of God is to purify themselves of all sins and to return home without sins like newborns. This is symbolized by wearing nothing but a white cloth, the way people came to this world. This idea of the death of the formerly sinful self and the birth of a new self is what the spirituality of the pilgrimage to the Ka'aba is all about. It is the same symbolic rebirth that primitive man observed in nature. This rebirth allows people to break free of their burden of guilt and continue living with a better sense of self.

However, this symbolic rebirth assumes a larger meaning. The Islamic worldview embodies a belief in cyclical time, but not in the Nietzschean sense where the same life is repeated infinitely, that the future is actually the past, and the past is a distant future; rather, they believe that death is not the end.³⁴ This idea delivers the same comfort that they seek from performing the ritual of Hajj, that the dead are not eternally lost, that someday they will reunite in a better life. That is, this life is just a beginning, it is not "the life;" the real life is the life in the hereafter that begins with physical death. The difference between this life and the hereafter is exactly the same difference between the celestial and terrestrial realms that the medieval mind constructed—that life on earth is corrupt, ever changing, and mainly characterized by suffering. In the celestial realm, life is eternal, and the souls rejoice in their close

proximity to the Divine. Hence, the Islamic conception of the circularity of time is conceived in the Quran in cosmic pattern of renewal and rebirth.

1. “By the star when it sets [and vanishes]”³⁵
2. He created the heavens and earth for a true purpose; He wraps the night around the day and the day around the night; He has subjected the sun and moon to run their courses for an appointed time; He is truly the Mighty, the Forgiving.³⁶
3. The sun, too, runs its determined course laid down for it by the Almighty, the All Knowing.³⁷
4. It is God who raised up the heavens with no visible supports and then established Himself on the throne; He has subjected the sun and the moon each to pursue its course for an appointed time; He regulates all things, and makes the revelations clear so that you may be certain of meeting your Lord.³⁸

These cosmic patterns point to the idea that time is cyclical, and everything ends just to start again. Similarly, the human being follows this circularity of time: Birth (young man or woman) à old age à death à resurrection, life in a higher realm (heavens) or lower realm (Hell). Are there going to be different people to start life on earth again? This is ambiguous; but, one can infer from the Quranic verses that it is a possibility:

“Allah begins the [process of] creation and then repeats.”³⁹

“O mankind! It is you who stand in need of God—God needs nothing and is worthy of all praise— if He wills, He can do away with you and bring in a new creation, that is not difficult for God.”⁴⁰

The starting of life again on earth remains only a possibility that is left to the benevolence of the Divine. Time is cyclical because it starts in heaven with the creation of Adam and ends in heaven with the last judgment. In this cycle, people start from truth and they go farther and farther away from it until they forget it completely.⁴¹ At that point, they are reminded about it with a horrific and surprising dissolution of the world:

1. And to Allah belongs the Unseen of the heavens and the earth. And the matter of the Hour is not but as a twinkling of the eye, or even nearer.⁴²
2. Draws near for mankind their reckoning, while they turn away in heedlessness.⁴³

Applying evolutionary Darwinism to human societies, people have understood social evolution in terms of linear progressive development, as moving from simple to complex, resulting in the ultimate progress of human society. In a sense, that's true. Knowledge is cumulative, and each generation adds to the knowledge that it inherits from the one that precedes it. Consequently, each generation knows more about the physical world than the one that came before, and evolution causes life to be more convenient. However, it does not bring us closer to the ultimate Truth. In this sense, the Quranic verses tell of devolution through time. That is, each generation is further away from the truth than the one that came before. That degeneration continues through time to the point that humanity will lose every sense of virtue and morality that is ordained by God, to the point that they will lose the last glimpse of Divine light in their souls. This is the unwise soul that mixed with filth until it has forgotten its divinity and become fiercely attached to pure physical possessions, which it has perfected through many series of evolutions:

Verily, the likeness of this worldly life is as the water [rain] which We send down from the sky; so by it arises the intermingled produce of the earth of which men and cattle eat: until when the earth is clad in its adornments and is beautified, and its people think that they have all the powers of disposal over it. Our Command reaches it by night or by day and We make it like a clean-mown harvest, as if it had not flourished yesterday! Thus do We explain the proofs in detail for the people who reflect.⁴⁴

Thus, evolution works hand in hand with devolution. At the point of a complete perfection and parallel complete imperfection, at the point where neither further evolution nor devolution is possible, is the moment of the destruction and dissolution of the world just to start afresh. The move in time is then from order to increasing disorder, ending in the apocalyptic moment of restoration to original orderliness.

In conclusion, this paper looked at the Islamic ritual of Hajj from multiple perspectives. The ritual of Hajj was examined from within the Islamic faith, in relation to philosophical tradition, and in relation to common spiritualities, beliefs, and inquiries that Islam shares with Christianity. This method of inquiry, which creates a point of interaction with other religious traditions, allows one to understand and appreciate her or his own traditions better. This approach of inquiry has its basis in the philosophy of religious pluralism, the view that each religion is a path to the same peak. Theologian John Hick suggested that religions are ways of conceptualizing experience and that, in spite of their differences, each religion reflects the same ultimate reality. They are, in a sense, looking at one thing from different perspectives. Interactions or dialogues between religions allow the chance for the multiplicity of perspectives that enrich one's

experience and understanding of her or his own religious tradition. At the heart of every (monotheistic) religion is the central belief in a God, and the pluralism of religions is only a manifestation of the complexity of God. As such, John Hick suggested a Copernican Revolution in theology, in which God becomes like the sun in the center, and all religions revolve around Him, affirming multiple perspectives in contemplating God.⁴⁵

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Notes

- ¹ Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd. *Early Greek Science: Thales to Aristotle* (New York: Norton, 1971), 105.
- ² David Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007), 50-51.
- ³ Lloyd, *Early Greek Science*, 118; Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science*, 51.
- ⁴ Lloyd, *Early Greek Science*, 110.
- ⁵ Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science*, 53.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.
- ⁸ Concerning motion, for Plato the moving force is the world's soul that inhabits the universe and animates it, moving the bodies of the universe (stars and planets) and making them alive. So, the world soul is the universe's life principle. Lindberg noted in his *The Beginning of Western Science* that the universe is alive and all living creatures possess a soul. Plato wrote in the *Timaeus* that the

demiurge placed a soul at the center of the universe “and caused it to extend throughout the whole and further wrapped its body round with soul on the outside; and so he established one world alone, round and revolving in a circle, solitary but able by reason of its excellence to bear itself company, needing no other acquaintance or friend but sufficient to itself [thus making the universe rational and alive]” (qtd. in Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science*, 42). Commenting on this, Lindberg writes “the world soul is ultimately responsible for all motions in the cosmos, just as the human soul is responsible for the motions in the human body” (*The Beginnings of Western Science*, 42). Building upon this notion, Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* replaces the world’s soul with the notion of God as the first (or unmoved) mover that sets all the celestial bodies in motion.

⁹ Lloyd, *Early Greek Science*, 122.

¹⁰ Lindberg, 60.

¹¹ Lloyd, 121.

¹² The Aristotelian cosmology offers a picture of an active universe.

¹³ Stars were conceived by the ancient mind as holes in the outermost sphere through which light of the Divine, the transcendent first mover, emanates.

¹⁴ Aristotelianism was the dominant school of thought in the European Middle Ages until the first half of the fifteenth century. At that time, the Italian humanists’ interest in ancient texts led them to search for the oldest possible documents. For example, they sought Plato’s writings and other documents that were thought to be very old, such as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the body of writings that were attributed to Hermes Trismegistus and which included magical and Neoplatonist writings. These works were translated into Latin by a number of humanists, chief among them Marsilio Ficino, a humanist patronized by the Medici court. The humanist movement ultimately led to the revival of Platonic and Neoplatonist thoughts.

¹⁵ Tadros Malaty, *Origen* (Jersey City: St. Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1995), 254.

¹⁶ Malaty, *Origen*, 284.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁸ Facaros, Dana & Pauls, Michael. *Italy*, 748.

¹⁹ Dennis Danielson, *The Book of the Cosmos: Imagining the Universe* (New York: Plenum Press, 1995), 18.

²⁰ Lloyd, *Early Greek Science*, 40.

²¹ Danielson, *The Book of the Cosmos*, 18-19.

²² Marcea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper, 1959), 157.

²³ Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 157-158.

²⁴ Quran 52:4.

²⁵ Quran 2: 125-27.

²⁶ Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 18.

²⁷ Ibid., 18.

²⁸ It is, in a sense, similar to the Gnostic belief that Salvation in this world comes through unification, where the people spiritually reunite with the Divine to return to their heavenly home: “My people, the life of this world is only a brief enjoyment; it is the Hereafter that is the lasting home” (Quran 40: 39). Similarly, people, according to the Gospel of Thomas, are entrapped in impoverished bodies, and they need to know that they are originally from the light of god, that they have the divine spark within, so they can liberate themselves. In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus said, “if they say to you, ‘Where did you come from?’ say to them, ‘We came from the light, the place where the light came into being of its own accord.’ If they say to you, ‘Is it you?’ say, ‘We are its children, and we are the elect of the living father’” (Willis Barnstone, *The Other Bible* [New York: Oxford UP, 1984], 303). The same idea is repeated in saying 3b of the same Gospel, “When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty [this earthly world where, in Origen’s philosophy, souls are mixed with filth] and you are that poverty” (Barnstone, *The Other Bible*, 300). Saying 49 affirms this teleology of the soul, where its natural place is in heaven. Jesus said, “Blessed are the solitary and elect, for you will find the kingdom. For you are from it, and to it you will return” (Barnstone, *The Other Bible*, 303). Similarly, the Quran expresses that the final end of the soul is in heaven and in earth it is just a temporal existence, “It is to God that you will all return, and He has power over everything” (Quran 11: 4); “It is to Him that you will return in the end, and He will tell you what you have done” (Quran 6: 60). Salvation comes by way of revealed knowledge; prophets, emissaries from God, recall people back to their heavenly origin and guide them to the right path. Ibrahim, after establishing the Shrine of God in Makkah, called people to perform this cosmic journey to Makkah every year: “Proclaim the pilgrimage to all people. They will come to you on foot and on every kind of swift mount, emerging from every deep mountain pass” (Quran 22: 27); “We showed Abraham the site of the House, saying, ‘Do not assign partners to Me. Purify My House for those who circle around it, those who stand to pray, and those who bow and prostrate themselves’” (Quran 22: 26).

²⁹ Hilary Armstrong, *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1967), 43.

³⁰ Returning to the heavens is the natural end of the soul. In the Islamic worldview, the resurrection is for both body and soul. The body is rewarded by following the soul. And the soul is punished by being a follower of the body, for being so weakly, controlled by bodily earthly desires. Through cycle rituals, people seek purity of the soul and train it to break free of the control of the body and what it desires. Rituals are a direct route to the experience of the Divine in this world. Through rituals, Muslims emphasize detachment from the material world. Hajj is a purification of the body to make it realize its attachment to the heavenly realm and to free it from the shackles of worldly desires, as worldly pleasures provide nothing but perishable happiness. Therefore, the believers’ condition in this life is to “be passers-by,” to know that this world is unimportant and that one should only pass it by to the other world, that one should not attach oneself to this world. “Bear in mind that the present life is just a game, a diversion, an attraction, a cause of boasting among you, of rivalry in wealth and children. It is like plants that spring up after the rain: their growth at first delights the sowers, but then you see them wither away, turn yellow, and become stubble. There is terrible punishment in the next life as well as forgiveness and approval from God; the life of this world is only an illusory pleasure” (Quran 57: 20). Accordingly, the world to come is real, while this earthly existence is unreal and unimportant; it is just preparation for that most important and higher existence in the afterlife.

³¹ Aristotle's identity theory of knowledge. Philip Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 20.

³² While the cave, in Platonic allegory, is a symbol of ignorance, in the Islamic story of revelation, it became the womb, the place where light is born. The prophet literally went to a cave to meditate the Divine when he saw the Light. He figuratively ascended out of the cave to the realm of being and received the wisdom in the form of revelation. God becomes the Platonic symbol of the sun (see the Gnostic symbol of light in footnote #5) and of knowledge that vanquishes darkness and ignorance. In chapter 24, verse 35, the Quran tells of this light of God: "God is the Light of the heavens and earth. His Light is like this: there is a niche, and in it a lamp, the lamp inside a glass, a glass like a glittering star, fuelled from a blessed olive tree from neither east nor west, whose oil almost gives light even when no fire touches it— light upon light—God guides whoever He will to his Light; God draws such comparisons for people; God has full knowledge of everything." From God human souls originated: "Your Lord said to the angels, 'I will create a mortal out of dried clay, formed from dark mud. When I have fashioned him and breathed My spirit into him, bow down before him,' and the angels all did so" (Quran 15: 28-30). This echoes the Gnostic belief that there is a Divine eternal soul within every human being that is worthy of the angels' prostrations. And immediately after the creation of Adam, God took from his back the souls of all the future humans who testified then that God is their Lord and Creator: "when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, 'Am I not your Lord?' and they replied, 'Yes, we bear witness.' So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We were not aware of this,'" (Quran 7: 172). However, once these disembodied souls are born in bodies, they forget this a priori knowledge. Therefore, the mission of the prophets is to remind people of this pre-experience covenant with God. This notion is reflective of the Platonic doctoring of recollection that Plato explains in the *Phaedo*. That is to say that the soul already has the knowledge within it, a prior experienced knowledge. Knowledge is remembering what one learned in the disembodied state, what one already knew but forgets when the soul goes into the body, since the soul in an infant's body, like the mind in the infant's body, is not ready for knowledge and thus it forgets; furthermore, the soul started in the heavenly realm and there is its final end. Therefore, one can see that, in Islam, conversion is not just turning towards the light outside the cave, but also remembrance of the knowledge of God and the Good that the soul learned in its disembodied state.

³³ In 1543, based on Platonic ideas, Copernicus published his view of the universe. His system stated that, instead of Earth, the sun is at the center of the universe: heliocentrism rather than geocentrism. The earth is a planet rotating around itself and revolving around the sun once a year, so that it is geokinetic rather than geostatic. This view of universe, with the sun in its center, fits well in the Platonic spirituality of the sun as representing the light, knowledge (as opposed to ignorance), and the ultimate good and ultimate truth that we must turn our faces towards.

³⁴ Nietzsche wrote in *The Gay Science* (1882), "What if a demon were to creep after you one day or night, in your loneliest loneliness, and say: 'This life which you live and have lived, must be lived again by you, and innumerable times more. And there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and every sigh— everything unspeakably small and great in your life—must come again to you, and in the same sequence and series. Would you not throw your self down and curse the demon who spoke to you thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment, in which you would answer him: 'Thou art a god, and never have I heard anything more divine!'" (Quoted in Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* [New York: Columbia UP, 2005], 191-192).

³⁵ Quran 53: 1.

³⁶ Quran 39:5.

³⁷ Quran 36:7.

³⁸ Quran 13:2.

³⁹ Quran 10:4.

⁴⁰ Quran 35: 15-17.

⁴¹ In the Islamic worldview, man's time on this Earth is declining after having reached its peak. In a sense, Islamic teachings contend that people were happiest in the beginning. The golden age has already passed by with the death of the Prophet Mohammad, and his death marked the beginning of the decline of human activity. The Prophet said, "The best people are those living in my generation, and then those coming after, and then those coming after" (Hadith of Bukhari 523). People have strayed away from the straight path that God draws for them; consequently, a sense of dissatisfaction with the world permeates everything and society becomes sick. In order to heal, the devout must always look back to the golden age and try to revive it. The prophet advised the generation coming after him: "Follow my Sunnah [teachings] and that of the rightly guided caliphs who would succeed me; hold onto it firmly and guard your selves against innovations, for every innovation is a mischief" (quoted in Thomas, Cox, and Kraty 15).

⁴² Quran 16:77.

⁴³ Quran 21:1.

⁴⁴ Quran 10:24.

⁴⁵ Interestingly enough, the Quranic chapter 5 verse 48 (John Hick noted) stresses the point that religious pluralism is part of God's plan.

Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ.

The point is that each should "live up to the highest standards of [his or her] own religious tradition" (Hick John. *Three Faiths One God: A Jewish, Christian, Muslim Encounter* [N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1989], 101). Doing that, people have to compete with one another (not in war) but in *good works*, and the truth claims will be clarified later when we all return to God.