

The Question of Truth

The *Falsafa* Project of the Knapp Foundation

for the symposium

FALSABA

The Intellectual History of Arab and Islamic Thought in Europe

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Abstract

In this paper I begin by examining the connection between the Arabic title *Falsafa* and Greek *philosophia*, the tradition of thinking that begins primarily with Plato and Aristotle, and becomes the “Western” intellectual tradition. I examine what is meant by the term “Europe” or “Western”, both in its contemporary form, and as it has been thought through the prism of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, and compare this with the tradition of thinking *Europa* in antiquity, and with authors like Aeschylus. I touch on the formation of modern geography and geopolitics, and lay out the outline of the *Falsafa* project of the Knapp Foundation, which will enquire into the intellectual history of Islam in Europe, not as a theological question, but as one arising from the same root, and within the same tradition, as the tradition of *philosophia* arose, first on the basis of the earliest Greek thinkers (Parmenides especially, but also Anaximander, Heraclitus and Empedocles), and emphasise the role the Islamicate scholars (Islamic, but also Jewish and Christian) in preparing the ground for the intertwining of the “religions of the book” or Abrahamic faiths and their intellectual concerns with the tradition of philosophy derived from Greek antiquity. Finally I ask, is it really true to say that Islam (or Judaism, for that matter) can really be said to be “outsiders” to a supposedly Christian, metaphysical “West”, or must this be part of a wider concern to uncover through their historical, thoughtful roots, the grounds of modern “Europe”.

“*Falsafa*” names a broad, but nevertheless uniquely Arab, if not exclusively Muslim transmission of a much older term, namely φιλοσοφία.¹ It names the way in which Muslim, but also Jewish and Christian scholars in what became the Islamicate world took up the tradition of Greek thought that arose on the basis of Plato, Aristotle and the various strands of Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian thought so decisive for that region of the world I am, very loosely, going to begin by calling “Europe”, or “the West”. I hope to indicate how unstable, we might even say narrowed, these latter names have become.

In naming *Falsafa*, the Knapp Foundation today launches what is for us one of our most important and long-planned areas of research, one we believe to be of great importance. We intend this project to unfold over several years, covering much ground. Some of what we want to explore is very well documented and understood, although not always widely known.² Other aspects of this project are much less clearly researched. There will therefore be two aspects to this undertaking: *first*, to make much more publicly and clearly available an existing body of knowledge; *second*, to show where there is more work to be done. In this opening paper I will want to say a little of why this project is of such importance to us, and how it connects with our other work.

I also want to be clear about what this project is not. Although explicitly theological questions will and do arise in *Falsafa*, this project is in no way a theological one, nor does it have an “interfaith” aspect. Although the three “religions of the book”, the Abrahamic religions, have each also become bound up with the fate and the historical unfolding of what flows to us from Greek antiquity, what has been decisive in this history and has emerged from it *as philosophy* has, paradoxically, little to do with divine revelation. *So* little, in fact, that the effect of this historical unfolding has acted as a containment and a block to the understanding of the God who is disclosed through God’s self-revelation. To take just the example of Christianity, especially in North-Western Europe and North America the preoccupation of systematic and philosophical theology has for several centuries been quite unironically to decide in advance the conditions under which God may be God, while continuing to claim to be faithful the experience of divine self-revelation.

¹ “Falsafa” is now a somewhat archaic term, not in general use or referring to any current practice or discipline.

² It is worthy of remark how often the influence of Islamic scholars has simply disappeared, or been understated, in the telling of the history of the “Abrahamic” encounter with Greek thought. For one example, Leo Strauss, in his influential essay ‘The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy’ accepts the importance of “the West in the wider sense of the term including even the whole Mediterranean basin” for telling this story, and mentions Jewish scholars like Maimonides or the Eleventh Century CE Yehuda Halevi, but neglects to mention that both were part of the Iberian Islamicate tradition, and mentions Arab and Islamic scholars not once in the entire discussion (he does add “to say nothing of the Muslim and others” – which is precisely as much as he does say, i.e., *nothing*). Leo Strauss, ‘The Mutual Influence of Philosophy and Theology’, pp. 113, 114.

On the other hand, the *Falsafa* project may very well throw light on the effect each of the religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam has had on each other. This is far from fanciful. One only has to consider how, under the terms I have already suggested, the modern or so-called “secular” world has transformed the self-understanding of the various forms of the revealed religions. But just as it is possible to trace the effects that Christianity had on the emergence of modern strands of Judaism, so, in ways that have I think barely been considered with any breadth, Islam may also have profoundly altered the direction and self-understanding of certainly some forms of Christianity (especially those in Western and Northern Europe), and possibly even Judaism as well.

Greek antiquity singled out and identified no formal topic of the investigation into, nor description of, the divine as such. By the word θεολογία Aristotle especially, and his successors, mean rather a mode of being, of presence, than consideration of any specific divine figure. If, to be sure, for the Greeks the gods are ἀθάνατος, and they are the ἀθάνατοι, this is from the inception of Greek thought (especially in Homer and in the poets) a way of speaking of that realm from which the gods emerge and the human experience of them rather than saying anything about their “character” or actuality. What distinguishes the emergence of metaphysics in Western Europe from the Middle Ages onwards is an already prepared encounter between revealed religion and Greek antiquity that transformed θεολογία and “the theological” from a means of talking about being and presence (ontology) into discourse about the divine itself. The emergence of *Falsafa*, or rather the thinkers who constituted it, was not merely an important, but a decisive step along this path, especially in the course of the emergence of Christian metaphysics as a Western rather than Eastern European phenomenon.

Here, however, it is necessary to take two important steps further back, for the emergence of φιλοσοφία in the forms it took at Aristotle’s and Plato’s hand was not an inception as such, but a step along the way from something entirely earlier and itself even more grounding, but which has until only very recently been visible for itself, and still now is difficult to see. For one example: for a very long time Plato’s dialogue the *Parmenides* was presumed to be a faithful representation of the doctrines of the Eleatics: foremost among them Parmenides, but also Zeno, and with them (possibly) Melissos, Xenophanes and Empedocles.

While there had been intermittent interest in the extant fragments of the earliest thinkers from the sixteenth century onwards in assorted compilations, the enormous steps taken by nineteenth-century German philology, above all figures like Christian Brandis (an influence on Hegel), Johannes Classen, Friedrich Mullach and Eduard Zeller, resulted in the scholarly edition of Parmenides’ fragments of Hermann Diels in 1897, *Parmenides Lehrgedicht* (or

“dogmatic poem”) a work later taken over and incorporated into Diels’ magisterial collections of “pre-socratic” fragments in 1903, and further revised by Walter Kranz in 1922. Philosophy itself was transformed by these developments, especially in Germany: Hegel’s *History of Philosophy* claims that not a single proposition of Heraclitus’s was not adopted by his *Logic*.³ Others – Erwin Rohde, Jacob Burckhardt, and above all Friedrich Nietzsche (perhaps the first to lecture specifically on the “Pre-Platonic philosophers”) were also definitive, to which the name of Wilhelm Dilthey must also be added.

What emerged from this frankly quite new departure in classical philology was not “pre-socratic philosophy” as such (although it often still bears that name) but the ability to see the earliest developments of philosophy at all, its beginnings, in above all the figures of Parmenides, Heraclitus, Anaximander, Empedocles and others, liberated to speak, not as Plato and Aristotle had reported them, but for themselves. Parmenides, it becomes clear, is the first to single out the Greek word ἀλήθεια, a word we now often translate as “truth”, and consider it *thoughtfully* for itself. This word was already in Homer, along with related and interchangeable terms, ἐτυμός, ὀρθότης, and the Greek verb εἶναι, ὄν (being), as ways of saying both what is “true” and what, as true, “is”. While the use of ἀλήθεια gains strength in the poetic tradition with figures like Theognis, Mimnermus, Simonides and others, it is Parmenides (whose relics also appear to us in poetic metre) who singles the term out and allies it in thoughtful terms – what we will later call philosophy – to the goddess Δίκη.

Karl Reinhardt, whose friendship with Martin Heidegger appears to have been lifelong, with the publication in 1916 of his *Parmenides und die Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie* (*Parmenides and the History of Greek Philosophy*) first made the audacious observation that Parmenides had presented his discussion of truth not as singular, but through three paths.⁴ These three are named by the goddess (known sometimes as Ἀλήθεια, at others Δίκη) as *first*, ἀλήθεια, the truth (disclosure) “of what is” (that being *is*), *second*, “that non-being is not”, and *third*, that truth as the “opinions” of mortal men and women is δόξα.⁵ She calls this last “the trodden paths of mortals . . . the opinions of mortals”,⁶ where what *is* and what *is not* is mixed up in the inability of mortal men and women to bring understanding to stability and open clarity.

³ G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I* (TWA18), p. 320. “Es ist kein Satz des Heraklit, den ich nicht in meine Logik aufgenommen.”

⁴ Karl Reinhardt, *Parmenides und die Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie* (1916).

⁵ DK28.1 30 / DK28.6 / DK28.8 51.

⁶ DK28.1 27 ἐπεὶ οὐτι σε μοῖρα κακὴ προύπεμπε νέεσθαι τήνδ’ ὁδόν (ἧ γὰρ ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων ἐκτὸς πάτου ἐστίν). DK28.8 61 τίς σε βροτῶν γνώμη

This elucidation of the interpretation of Parmenides, whose outlines Martin Heidegger later said he had reached at about the same time and which, in ways still to be fully understood, were central to the entire history of Heidegger's own work. So central that they laid the basis for a revolutionary understanding of Plato and Aristotle, especially for the dialogues *The Sophist* and *Theaetetus*, as well as for Aristotle, especially the *Metaphysics*. That truth should *essentially* appear in this threefold manner attends the entire tradition that follows on from it, even when not fully understood, in ways that I will point to later.

Central to each of the research endeavours of the Knapp Foundation has been the question of what *grounds* our areas of enquiry in each case. Our concern is to return to the question of the understanding of truth, of how the way what we enquire into finds its foothold. That what is to be understood ("what is true") appears as in some way double, both as the way a thing *is* and the way it manifests in discourse (the way it is generally and broadly understood, the way it manifests in the discussions and deliberations of men and women) has laid out the path for *how* we conduct each of the enquiries we undertake. The question of ground always appears as the pursuit of the order of enquiring, finding out what lies *prior*, what makes what possible. Does the more general understanding make the way a thing *is* possible, or is it the other way around? This questioning takes many different forms, but will be familiar to many who know the thought of the Middle Ages, where it manifests as the enquiry into the difference between the *ordo essendi* and the *ordo cognoscendi* (distinct for us, but not for God). In fact discerning the *actual* and *historical* appearance of a phenomenon, the way it manifests itself as the way it *has* manifested itself over time is the most decisive of the two, since how something is generally understood is only possible on the basis of the historical unfolding of a phenomenon.

This is the first of the two important steps I have named. In the case of *Falsafa*, How do we exhibit the *ground* of what *Falsafa* names, and in so doing, how do we show what steps are made in the unfolding of its own history? This brings me to the second step I named earlier. I said earlier that the very ground for the *Falsafa* project is that region of the world I have very loosely, referred to as "Europe", or "the West". This claim runs directly counter to the contemporary and general understanding of the history both of Islam and what has been more widely called the Islamicate. Foremost in this has been Edward Said's postulation of the concept of "Orientalism", and the set of narratives that we might loosely constitute as "decolonial". Said tells us: "The European encounter with the Orient, and specifically with Islam, strengthened this system of representing the Orient [. . .] and turned Islam into the very

epitome of an outsider against which the whole of European civilization from the Middle Ages on was founded”.⁷

There are several observations I would like to make about this quotation. First, it arises on the basis of a concept of Europe that is strictly “modern”, most importantly, not predating at the earliest 1650 (and really a Europe of the late 18th and the 19th Centuries), and locates “the West” as simply that region which encompasses what we would in fact call only western, and above all, north-western Europe, namely the trio of nations and their immediate satellites represented by the United Kingdom, France and Germany, and their subsequent extension into North America and Australasia. Somewhat tongue-in-cheek, it could be possible to argue that this region is a product, not of Islam’s exclusion from Europe, but of Islam’s success as a European presence, since, with Scandinavia (which for complex reasons not discussable here does not really figure in this narrative) this narrow “western” circle of nations are the only countries never, or almost never (since we should not forget some smaller Mediterranean regions which are now French), touched or threatened by invasions by powers that called themselves Islamic.

Second, the representation of “the Orient” with which Said is concerned is itself a very recent phenomenon, largely a construct of the 19th Century and its political machinations, with little or no historical antecedent, despite his earnest attempts to argue to the contrary. Third, this concept of Europe ignores the history of a Europe as the inheritor of *both* Greek antiquity *and* the “religions of the book”. It focuses on “Europe” as a “Christian” affair, in which other religions appear as visitors or outsiders. While Said is entirely correct to argue that this Europe that posits its Oriental wing as a phantasm is the modern way that “Europe” understands itself, this self-understanding has no basis, I repeat, *no* basis in the *actual* history of the emergence of Europe as a whole. This narrow, “contemporary” Europe is the triumph of the extension of a certain “seizing of the globe” as a whole for the sake of technological and technocratic control, a “Europe” of the organisation of production and consumption and economic rationalisation. A Europe that seeks to slip the moorings of its own history, and so forget its own grounds.

For it cannot be denied that in the current arrangements of what has come to be called “geopolitics” there lies a basis for what Said argues: that governments of states with predominantly Muslim populations have been held at bay or in second place to the prevailing “West”, the blocs of power represented by North America, by the European powers, even by

⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (2003), p. 70.

the intricacies of machination surrounding China and the Russian Federation and the shifting sands of their allies. Said himself admitted in a commentary written in the year of his death that “*Orientalism* is very much a book tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history. I emphasise in it accordingly that neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other.”⁸ Said, quite conventionally, understands “the geographical” or “geopolitical” to be an “imaginary” in consequence of the distributions and effects of “power”: “The secular world is the world of history as made by human beings”. He concludes that “the cultural, historical phenomenon of Orientalism [is] a kind of willed human work”.⁹ In this he is in safe accord with the “postmodernists” he occasionally disdains.

Said is right to address the seething cauldron of contemporary political life, the global seizing and arrangement of the planet as an “ontological instability”, what Ernst Jünger and Martin Heidegger each called a “*Verwüstung*”, a “devastation”,¹⁰ and Karl Marx described as a bourgeois phenomenon in which “all that is solid melts into air”.¹¹ But is it correct to understand “the West” and its phenomenal appearance through its opposites, and in the case of *Falsafa* and Islam, “the orient”, as a willed human work?

For I repeat, “the West” at issue here is hardly the *Ευρώπη* of antiquity, of, let us say, Aeschylus in particular (one of the earlier users of the term). If contemporary *opinion* conceives of “the West” as what flows geopolitically from the blocs of power represented by North America, by the European powers, opposed by China and Russia, to understand *Falsafa* means to step back into a far older and more difficult question, much harder and more difficult to address: why Greece? And how, and why, does Greece – even *should* Greece – (above every other) lie at the base of this older Europe? Geopolitics emerged as a discipline not from an analysis of modern constitutions and relations (and distributions of power) between states but

⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. xii

⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, pp. xii; 15.

¹⁰ Jünger speaks of “*Verwüstung*” in several places in Ernst Jünger, ‘Das Wäldchen 125: Eine Chronik aus den Grabenkämpfen 1918’ (SW1) to illustrate how the immediacy of the new way of war ends the postponement of apocalypse to a *jenseits*, a “beyond”. Behind this devastation lies “new life” (SW1:321). In one case he speaks of a battlefield, saying: “Es war ein Kirchhof, auf den wie ein Jüngstes Gericht die Verwüstung niedergegangen war” (“It was a churchyard upon which devastation had fallen like a Last Judgment”) (SW1:347). Heidegger develops this theme by arguing that, just as Jünger had shown that the total mobilisation characterising twentieth century war overtakes and becomes the driver of life even without war, so the devastation wrought by war also becomes “normal”, and yet more devastating, when it becomes the driver of everyday life outside times of war. See Martin Heidegger, ‘Abendgespräch in einer Kriegsgefangenenlager in Rußland zwischen einem Jüngeren und einem Älteren’ (GA77), *passim*, esp. p. 216, “die Verwüstung auch dort und gerade dort herrscht, wo Land und Volk von den Zerstörungen des Krieges nicht getroffen wurden” (the devastation also here, and precisely here, prevails where country and people have not been hit by the destruction of war”).

¹¹ Karl Marx, ‘Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei, 1848’ (MEW4, p. 465), “Alles Ständische und Stehende verdampft, alles Heilige wird entweiht.”

at the hands of geographers who sought to understand its topology and manners of appearing. Among them were Ratzel, Kohl, Naumann and later Kjellén, and the Scotsman Halford Mackinder.¹²

When we ask the question “why Greece?”, we ask not only *why*, but also *how* the Greek tradition of thought became integral to the foundation of what *Falsafa* is also part of the history of. The answer to the question “why Greece?” is not at all self-evident. Greece is by far not the most ancient civilisation, preceded as it was by the Egyptian, Akkadian, Babylonian achievements, but also the civilisations of the East, of China, Japan, or of Persia, of the Indian sub-continent, and many others on the African and American continents.

Mackinder suggests what we now and narrowly conceive as “Europe”, with the lands it colonised and took over (in what he calls the “Columbian” age), has as mere territory or as mere sets of constitutions and political arrangements alone, been poorly delineated. He adds: “I ask you, therefore, for a moment to look upon Europe and European history as subordinate to Asia and Asiatic history, for European civilization is, in a very real sense, the outcome of the secular struggle against Asiatic invasion”.¹³ By “secular” he means, not, as with Said, “contemporary”, but rather in its older meaning of perennial, and over millennia. Europe is the condensation and consequence of the ceaseless movements of Asiatic peoples. Many recent authors have addressed this thesis, some of them recapitulating the same thesis Mackinder outlines, often without direct reference to his work: most recently Christopher Beckwith, Warwick Ball and Barry Cunliffe all advance versions of this thesis.¹⁴ This movement of peoples across the Steppe, across the centuries, is what gave rise to Greece, *and* what gave rise to the modern world, and Mackinder made a powerful case for the interconnection of the sea-basins and land-masses of Western antiquity as an *effect* of events that took place on (he says) “the continuous land-mass of Euro-Asia [and] thus included between the ocean and the desert, [which] measures 21,000,000 square miles, or half of all the land on the globe”. The movements of peoples on this vast land-mass “so stirred and united Europe that we may count

¹² Mackinder’s most summary important essays are Halford Mackinder: ‘The Geographical Pivot of History’ (1904); ‘The Physical Basis of Political Geography’ (1890); and ‘On the Scope and Methods of Geography’ (1887). Mackinder was fluent in German and knew the German geographers very well.

¹³ Halford Mackinder, ‘The Geographical Pivot of History’, p. 423.

¹⁴ Christopher Beckwith has written a multitude of books on the long history of the formation of Europe from out of Asia, and drawn attention to the influence of central Asian Buddhism and Zoroastrianism to the shaping of that formation. See: Christopher Beckwith: *Empires of the Silk Road* (2009); *The Scythian Empire* (2023); *Warriors of the Cloisters* (2012).

them as the beginning of modern history – another striking instance of European advance stimulated by the necessity of reacting against pressure from the heart of Asia”.¹⁵

Why does Greek antiquity assume such a place of importance in the origination of “the West”, and why is what is Greek continually appropriated, by Rome, by Jewish, Christian and Islamic intellectual traditions, and marked by the rise of neo-classicism in its multitude forms from the late middle ages up to the present day? This question “why” implies no necessity or inevitability, no principle of causation nor even “progress”, no advance as “superiority”, but rather manifests itself in its “how?” *and that it did*. It simply “was”, and in multitude ways this *was* still “is”. How, and in what ways, does Greece come about, and continue its presence in this “West”, this Abrahamic West, and in what and how it thinks?

The original geographers and thinkers of what became geopolitics thought not in terms of imaginaries or constructs, but of the actual shape of land-masses, and the inter-relationship between land-mass, the seas, waterways, the climate, and the revolution of the seasons. Mackinder and others proposed a way of thinking the meaning of the globe that begins with the interactions of, he says, the “atmosphere, hydrosphere, and lithosphere”, taking into account “great world-wide forces”, “the sun’s heat and the earth’s rotation on its axis” and “the ellipticity of the earth’s orbit and the obliquity of its axis”. It is difficult not to hear in this description the interactions of the *ρίζώματα* of Empedocles,¹⁶ stripped of their Aristotelian interpretation as a kind of “alchemy”, the later suggestion that everything was some kind of “physical” combination of the *στοιχεία* or “elements” (a word that Empedocles himself never gives us in what remains of him). Mackinder adds: “Everywhere political questions will depend on the results of the physical inquiry. Certain conditions of climate and soil are needed for the aggregation of dense populations. A certain density of population seems necessary to the development of civilisation.”¹⁷ What is required is “the reaction”, by which he means inter-reaction, the very being-in-the-midst, “of man on nature”, to establish the character – we might say the presence, the very being, of the communities of the earth.

The “Europe” of antiquity did not exclude, but rather took for granted the incorporation of the whole of the Mediterranean and Black Sea rims, from the Maghreb in the west to the

¹⁵ Halford Mackinder, *The Geographical Pivot of History*, pp. 429, 431. See also Warwick Ball, *The Eurasian Steppe* (2021) and Barry Cunliffe, *By Steppe, Desert and Ocean* (2015) for just a few examples.

¹⁶ Empedocles is normally associated with the four “elements” (*στοιχεία*) of earth, water, air and fire. In fact in the extant fragments we have, Empedocles never uses the word “elements” at all, but speaks of “roots” (*ρίζώματα*), which he does not list as four, but in various combinations. Most commonly he links earth, water and air as belonging together, and then speaks of other roots such as fire and aether separately from these three. Mackinder, who to my knowledge was not directly influenced by Empedocles or these divisions, often comes close to making the same distinctions and separations of forces of which Empedocles speaks.

¹⁷ Halford Mackinder, ‘On the Scope and Methods of Geography’ (1887), p. 155 ff.

Levant and Syria in the East, extending eventually all the way over to the western seaboard of the Caucasus (ancient Colchis), lower Egypt, and much that we would now call the Middle East. It is in these regions – modern-day Syria, Iraq, Egyptian North Africa, and later the Iberian peninsula and what came to be called the Sicilian Emirate that what came to be called *Falsafa* as the inheritance of Greek antiquity was preserved and thrived *and handed on*. Although it is possible only to allude to it without examining it in detail, the encounter with Islam of that advancing pressure from Asia – of Mongolian, Turkic and other Asiatic inroads into Europe (especially in the murky and poorly-documented and little understood establishment of various kinds of kingdom, Jewish and Islamic in Crimea, in the Caucasus and modern-day Ukraine, Kuban and central Asia) is the result of the encounter of these invaders with an Islam that they encountered when they arrived, and so not with what they brought with them. Becoming Muslim was a central aspect of their *actual* inroad into Europe. The Volga Bulgars, for instance, who eventually became Christian, were almost certainly originally Muslim. Almost as an aside, the figure of Volodymyr, so revered in the story of the Christian conversion of “Rus”, of modern-day Russia and Ukraine, can be claimed variously also by Jewish and Muslim sources as having been, at least at some point, one of their own.¹⁸

Such a history, integral to the history of *Falsafa* itself, requires a very different conception of “occident” and orient, far broader and more complex, than we are accustomed to from contemporary sources or the distribution of power across constructed spaces. It is the centuries-long *actuality*, the actual unfolding of *Falsafa* in Europe that discloses that Islam and its intellectual tradition is *insider* to, and in part constitutive of, what we have now come to call Europe and “the West”.

For we must keep in view that not one, but *two* ways (if we heed the goddess and exclude the “way of non-being”) in which truth unfold are integral to the essence of truth as it is explained and laid down by Parmenides. It is the unfolding of these, together with the “path of non-being” that form the history of truth itself, with which *Falsafa* is unbreakably involved. Said makes much of what he believes to be the modern consequence of an attitude he traces to classical Greece and its inheritance in Rome. He understands the division between the Greek and Roman world and the “Asiatic” world to be grounded in a separation that, he says, existed “to prove that Romans and Greeks were superior to other kinds of people”.¹⁹ He cites

¹⁸ See a basic factual discussion of Volodymyr, Edward Davies, *Europe: A History*, p. 326 f. Concerning Volodymyr’s religious conversion, Davies’ enigmatic phrase “he had weighed various alternatives” neatly aggregates and glosses over a multitude of competing accounts. See Ali ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fi’l-ta’rīkh*, (*The Complete History*) for some evidence of these.

¹⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 57.

Aeschylus (hence my earlier mention of him), and above all Aeschylus's *The Persians* (together with Aeschylus's *Bacchae*), as evidence for this. We may say that the position Said identifies is attested above all in Hegel's *Philosophy of World History* – that flawed pinnacle of metaphysical speculation, the historical working out of the consequences of Hegel's *Logic*, that asserts, above all, the superiority of the German encapsulation of the Greek inheritance (with no account of how the Germans came to be Greece's inheritors), and that reaches its apogee through Kojève and Fukuyama to postulate the “end of history”.²⁰ Put simply the “end of history” becomes the condition for the triumph of that understanding of the West that satisfies the condition of “humanism”, of a globalised project of liberal democracy and economic stability. It is precisely this understanding that Heidegger believed to be a “devastation”, and which led Heidegger to launch his attack on the very concept of humanism. Yet Said roots himself in humanism, a humanism that Heidegger rooted in Plato and the inception of metaphysics in Plato's understanding of truth,²¹ one that undermined the meaning of what is present for the sake of a “beyond”, a supersensible of the ideas.

Why should humanism undermine the meaning of what is present? Heidegger argues that every humanism – of “humankind” (*Menschentum*), or “humanity” (*Menschheit*), of the individual, or community, or nation and people, has the same effect: namely that the human being in every case and knowingly “moves into a central place for what is present” such that the human being itself becomes the ground of what ever “is”,²² and thus the actual ground (and this includes the real physicality of the locale, the “place” within which it appears, the “ground on which it stands”) is obscured and becomes lost and disappears. What is present is never then grounded in itself and in its own presencing for itself (*φύσις, φαίνεσθαι*), but must be grounded “metaphysically” from some source or cause beyond itself, say in the idea of the good (Plato) or the totality of the cosmos (Aristotle), or God (theistic metaphysics) or “ethics” and eternal return (the end of metaphysics in Hegel, Nietzsche and Marx), but always *through* the grounding of the human “self” who “knows” and so “validates” (values, gives value to, “posits” and thereby “grounds”) what in fact already “is”.²³ It is easy to recognise in Said's account the “devastation” of Heidegger's claim.

²⁰ See Francis Fukuyama, ‘By Way of an Introduction’ in *The End of History* (1992), pp. xi–xxiii.

²¹ See the last section of Martin Heidegger, ‘Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit (1931/32, 1940)’ (GA9), esp. 236 f. Heidegger asserts here “Der Beginn der Metaphysik im Denken Platons ist zugleich der Beginn des ‘Humanismus’ (The beginning of metaphysics in the thinking of Plato is at the same time the beginning of ‘humanism’).”

²² Martin Heidegger, ‘Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit’ (GA9), p. 236. “Der Mensch nach je verschiedenen Hinsichten, jedesmal aber wesentlich in eine Mitte des Seienden rückt.”

²³ This, I admit, is an extremely truncated account of what Heidegger summarises as Kant's “being as positedness” (*Sein als Position*), which is what Heidegger means when he speaks of *das Ge-stell*. Whatever is present is only understood on the basis of the “I think”, the representing (*vor-stellende*) self.

For Said misses the point of Aeschylus's tragedy. *The Persians* does not celebrate a hubris, namely the victory of "inherently" superior Greeks over inferior Asiatic Persians, and so the moment of the "birth" of the extraneous "orient". We have already seen from the geographer's account of the formation of Greece that Greece must be understood as itself an *effect* of Asiatic movement: it is integrally a consequence of what simultaneously *produces* and *threatens* it. This process of threat and production does not cease, but repeats itself in European history even to this day. This is not its "outside", it is its very "being".

The undecided question is the *what* of what is threatened. Is it the superiority of "European life" as such that is threatened, or some aspect of that? In which case why should this not be decided merely by a contest within the will to power? *What is it* that stands threatened in the contemporary situation? Is it truth? In what form? – as the mere exchange of opinions – your world, your "values" your way of life, your economic organisation versus ours (whoever "you" and "we" are)? Are Greeks simply (inherently) superior to Persians? Are we all not human, and should there not be unity among "humans" in a common "humanity"? It is difficult not to hear in this a degree of triviality, a superficiality that *glosses over* the actual and historical occurring that each of us *is* in the history and being that we *are*, namely, that we *make present*.

Heidegger threw into relief Plato's understanding of truth, and what he called the fateful "decision" to understand truth as "beyond being"²⁴ because the account of truth that emerged within metaphysics simply addressed what was present in its *mere* presence, and could not show in what way it had come about, *through dis-closure*, ἀ-λήθεια itself (its manner of "being-present", of *presencing*). Thus the *mere* superiority of one way of life over another – as in Hegel – provided no understanding of *either way of life*: the supposedly inferior or supposedly superior. To tell me that you are superior to me without showing me how you, how I, have unfolded into our respective being, the lives we lead *and their manner of being led, their "how"*, is the mere exchange of opinion, and says nothing at all. To show how each of us has unfolded and in what ways and with what we are confronted and what our possibilities for being are is itself the unfolding of the truth of each of us, a genuine dis-closing of ourselves to ourselves and *to* and *for* each other. In this we should hear the contrasted "paths" of Parmenides – of ἀλήθεια and δόξα, which belong to each other, but where one explains the other and takes priority *not in value but in capacity for understanding*. In this ἀλήθεια lies

²⁴ Pl. *Resp.* 509 b 10 ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος.

prior to δόξα as what explains the “how”, in the unfolding of what *actually is*, it can be “taken” for less than it is in mere opinion.

In the *Persians*, after the report of the defeat of Xerxes, the chorus taunts the Persian Queen: “Not long will those in the land of Asia remain under Persian rule”. The chorus continues “nor must mortals keep their opinions (γλῶσσα) under guard: for the people have been set free to speak with precision (βάζειν) freely”.²⁵

The attribution to Aeschylus of a Greek hubris is anachronistic: the Persians invaded with vastly superior force, not as strangers but all too recognisably as advancing tyrants. It is the Greeks, with their ability to speak directly and sharply (precisely, βάζειν) in speaking of *how things are*, to let what must be said *be said* who are strange. They are strange because they have no need of tyranny, but are led from within themselves from out of themselves, but *with respect to the way in which they experience the world in which they themselves unfold as a people*. This involves all the questions of geography and place that I have earlier indicated, but even more, their history *as* a located people, a πόλις. For the πόλις is founded not in happiness, nor in contentment, nor for comfort, nor for “peace” (nor for pacificity, the absence of threat and risk, that modern, weasel, temptation), – all these things are not “strange” but all too well known to Greek and to Persian alike. What is strange is *freedom*: freedom to let things be spoken of as they are (and not as the tyrant wills). (One might note that this very *freedom* is what lies at the heart of the metaphysical experience and explanation of the *being* of the Abrahamic God). It is *tyranny* that insists things are kept hidden and live in their unknowing, their unessence, their not-really, and therefore *non-being*. This verb βάζειν, sharpness of speech, is derived from βαίνω, to go forward, even to step or step up. The people step forth in freedom by means of what can now be said from a βάσις (also from βαίνω), a foothold in the way things really are. The people *know* and can speak of what and how they *know* what *is*. The victory over Xerxes extends the freedom of the Greeks to let what *is* be seen *as it is* from a firm grounding *even to the Persians* themselves. The defeat of Xerxes opens the Persians to the strangeness *that the Greeks have themselves been opened to* (this freedom in itself is nothing *inherently* Greek, *inherently* Persian). This thesis can be found throughout Herodotus himself.

In commenting on Parmenides’ fragments, Heidegger notes the close connection between γλῶσσα, the opinions of the everyday, and what is to be brought to speech in λόγος

²⁵ Aesch. *Pers.* 584–5., 591–3 [594]. τοὶ δ’ ἀνὰ γᾶν Ἀσίαν δὴν / οὐκέτι περσονομοῦνται [. . .] οὐδ’ ἔτι γλῶσσα βροτοῖσιν / ἐν φυλακαῖς: λέλυται γὰρ / λαὸς ἐλεύθερα βάζειν, / ὡς ἐλύθη ζυγὸν ἀλκᾶς.

as what is to be disclosed – namely, that which is to be said sharply and precisely, placed on a firm footing and basis, given its ground – what Aeschylus calls βάζειν. Heidegger notes the unfolding of truth, ἀλήθεια, is not a method, not an opinion, but the goddess Ἀλήθεια (truth itself, in its divine aspect) directs by “liberating, inasmuch as she thrusts out into the open realm”²⁶ to let *what is* be seen *as it is*.

The *Falsafa* project is therefore a twofold project: it aims both to bring back into the open realm the history of the Arab-Islamic contribution to the unfolding of the West itself, *as* the preservation of an understanding of truth from its Greek inception and to the present day, not as a hubris, but as a path of preserving what was and *has been* most preciously received *to this very day*. And added to this, it aims *itself* to stand in that tradition of speaking truly, as a constitutive part of that tradition. It aims, therefore, to bring back into the open the history of “Europe”, if by Europe we mean the *Europa* that the geographers began to make visible as the unfolding of the inception and history of a thinking in a place defined not through an imaginary, or through a rational process, but as *itself* an actuality, a history, in its places, and its times.

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Der Anfang der Abendländischen Philosophie* (GA35), p.140. “[Die Göttin führt,] indem sie freigibt und ins Freie stößt.”

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