

EIR Conference

Ibn Sina and the potential for a new Euro-Arab renaissance

by Mary Brannan

A conference sponsored by the *Executive Intelligence Review* and Humanist Academy in Paris on the millennium of the birth of the great Islamic scientist ibn Sina (Avicenna), "The Fight for Progress and Science," provoked an uproar rarely seen among French and Middle Eastern political and intellectual circles. In the days preceding the Dec. 12-13 conference, newspaper headlines told of "Polemics around Avicenna Conference." Several scheduled conference participants hastily withdrew—including one who falsely announced in the pages of the prestigious French newspaper *Le Monde* that the conference had been postponed—and others were severely pressured not to take part. This unsuccessful attempt to disrupt the ibn Sina conference, conducted by the Khomeinist Muslim Brotherhood terrorists and their European cothinkers in the Second International, displayed their fear of the power of ideas. Born in 980, and living in the area which is now Afghanistan and Iran, ibn Sina, both as a thinker and a political leader, was the outstanding figure in the Arab Renaissance. His writings on science, philosophy, and medicine preserved and developed the Platonic epistemology, the science of how human mind works, and sparked the Italian Renaissance which revived civilization in the modern world.

The continuing significance of ibn Sina's ideas for science today in the fight against irrationalism and academic sterility was the theme of the conference. Attending were 150 French and Middle Eastern intellectuals, political figures, engineers, scientists, and students, including representatives of several embassies, and Dr. Osmond Bakar of the University of Malaysia, which is planning a July 1981 conference on ibn Sina. Journalists representing the French and German national wire services, the major Paris dailies, and Kuwaiti and Saudi newspapers covered the conference.

Criton Zoakos, editor-in-chief of the *Executive Intelligence Review*, gave the keynote address, on ibn Sina's conception of the Necessary Existent, asserting that the method of ibn Sina is essential for the solution of the

scientific problems facing us today, notably in the field of fusion energy. The key conceptual difficulty in fusion power, said Zoakos, is the problem of the "field-particle paradox." This problem, which takes the form "do the elementary particles exist as primary elements, or is the real existent the geometry of dynamic relationships which defines the 'particles'?" can be solved by using the epistemological method of ibn Sina.

Zoakos explained that "ibn Sina divided the world into two domains: the ephemeral and the eternal. This is the first statement of relativistic physics." Ibn Sina defined a material object as "a specific organization of space—a remarkably accurate description of an electron," Zoakos noted.

'Man's identity is reason'

In particular, he said, "scientists must understand ibn Sina's essential contribution to epistemology: that the human mind must first develop a consciousness of itself. The act of knowledge involves three elements: the Knower, the Known, and Knowledge, and when man examines himself as the object of Knowledge, the Knower and the object of Knowledge become one. In that way, individual human beings understand that 'I am Knower, the Known, and Knowledge.' The individual's very identity becomes Knowledge. It is this knowledge which makes man different from other species. And it is this sense of identity as Knowledge which societies must be organized to fulfill in human beings."

Zoakos concluded that "the body of knowledge contributed by ibn Sina belongs to the domain of the eternal. The future of his ideas is secure. The question facing us, is what is going to happen to the nations of the Middle East and Europe? If those nations fail to master and advance the ideas of ibn Sina they will suffer." If they succeed, he added, "Nations will flourish and civilization will outshine the grandeur of the Islamic Renaissance of the Middle Ages."

The discussion following Zoakos's presentation fo-

cused on the content of scientific policy. Zoakos challenged the audience, saying that it is up to them, to scientists, to stop the starvation of millions of people, and gave as a graphic example of the implementation of Club of Rome policy the devastation of Cambodia under the Pol Pot butchers.

When Zoakos added that this is precisely what is taking place in Iran, a storm of protest arose from members of the audience. "The Iranian model cannot be judged by any standard other than its own," one declared.

Zoakos responded that ibn Sina, himself the greatest Iranian in history, "wrote that there is one higher universal Reason which subordinates all others, and—unless Khomeini wants to declare ibn Sina wrong and [medieval Islamic bestialist] al-Ghazali right—You are wrong when you say that the Iranian revolution can be judged on the basis of any other Reason than mine."

Cities and self-perfection

Professor Aly Mazaheri, a historian and teacher at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Science Sociale (School of Advanced Studies in Social Science) in Paris, outlined the thought of ibn Sina's cothinker al-Farabi on the state. Describing al-Farabi's book on the "Virtuous City"—better translated, said Mazaheri, as "The Scientific City,"—he said that al-Farabi described cities, a concept equivalent for all modern intents and purposes to the state, as the necessary condition for human development.

Man can perfect himself only in a city, al-Farabi said, because only the city offers mankind the social conditions requisite to scientific development. This principle of scientific inquiry applies equally to the government of cities, which should be composed of directorates of several people, through whose ongoing dialogue wisdom can be increased. Al Farabi said that the more a state advances toward perfection—toward industrialization, Mazaheri specified—and wisdom, the stronger it would grow. Al-Farabi stressed that the citizens, not only the rulers, must be educated in wisdom, and denounced cities where religious dictatorships prevented the increase and spread of knowledge.

Following Professor Mazaheri's speech, the discussion drew the wrath of cultural relativists in the audience. "If you say that there is one superior philosophy," said one participant, "this is tyranny!" Again using ibn Sina's method, Zoakos responded: "You are putting forward this argument to convince me that there is not one Reason but that there are many reasons. However, if you succeed in convincing me, then there is universal agreement, and therefore one universal Reason! Reason has no need to impose itself with tyranny; only unreason needs to resort to violence. If societies fail to regenerate the faith of their citizens in Reason, then they will

collapse into a miasma of unreason, violence, and tyranny," concluded Zoakos.

Ibn Sina's influence in Europe

Mrs. Helga Zepp-LaRouche of the Humanist Academy, who chairs the European Labor Party in Germany, was to have addressed the conference Dec. 13 on ibn Sina's influence in Europe. However, as Zoakos explained, threats against her had made her attendance impossible. "We have made many enemies because of our achievements," said Mr. Zoakos, and named some of those who had tried to destroy the ibn Sina conference, including some United Nations and Unesco-related circles, and circles associated with French Socialist Party leader François Mitterrand. In Mrs. Zepp-LaRouche's absence, Zoakos presented the conclusions of her study.

Shortly after ibn Sina's death, his works were translated into Latin and widely circulated throughout Europe. Among those influenced by his ideas were Pope Sylvester II, known as "the Pope with the Arab spirit," Roger Bacon, and Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa. Bacon promoted the study of ibn Sina and founded an Avicennian faction among scholars in Paris.

Cusa's concept of the "Non-Other," discovered Mrs. Zepp-LaRouche, is identical to ibn Sina's Necessary Existent. Following ibn Sina, Cusa demonstrates that the laws governing the human mind are identical to the laws governing material processes in the universe. The invariant in the life of the universe is the succession of moments of transformation from one domain of lawfulness to higher laws. This principle is equivalent to the most advanced conception in modern science, negentropy.

The question of political program is also addressed by Cusa, who said that each individual must act to fulfil his creative potential, and that harmony between states and individuals can only be achieved when both are committed to the development of creativity. "When people like Sartre are accepted as intellectuals," said Zoakos, "then we are really oppressed. There could be nothing more exciting, however, than having three and a half billion excited, developing minds around us!"

The final presentation was made by Ezzar Rastkar, an expert on Iranian poetry and former professor of methodology at the University of Teheran, who outlined the traditional themes of Persian mysticism, the cult of Mithra, and the influence of ibn Sina's father, a member of the so-called Egyptian school, on his son. Rastkar debunked those who claim that ibn Sina was in any way an Aristotelian and pointed to his attacks on Aristotle. Zoakos commented that whatever influence his father and the Mithra cult might have had on the young ibn Sina, ibn Sina's own search for the cause of things can alone explain his thought.