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Masterpieces of Muslim Philosophers

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Abstract— Locating masterpieces by Muslim philosophers in the field of philosophy is a challenge for several reasons: the interconnectedness between human knowledge as a discipline, and that this theme cannot be innovative. In addition, in order to understand the roots of philosophy within the Arab cultural environment and its development it is necessary to examine the history of Arab culture. Arab culture can trace its origins back thousands of years to the Mesopotamian, Pharaonic, and Saba and Himyar Civilizations.

Although these civilizations witnessed the birth of streams of thought that can be considered philosophy, the word philosophy itself was not used because it is a Greek word. Despite the fact that philosophy dates to Ancient Greece, it is considered modern in comparison with the civilizations of Mesopotamia and Pharaonic Egypt. Thus, it is more accurate to refer to the beliefs developed by these civilizations as thought and not philosophy. Indeed, the word philosophy only came to be applied to Arab culture with the arrival of Al Kindi (801- 870 CE).

When examining the use of the term philosophy in the context of Arab culture, we will determine the meaning of the word and explain how it was defined in ancient times; specifically, whether the sources that Muslim philosophers relied upon were Greek or other sources.

This paper comprises only an introduction, describing the multiple approaches and the achievements conferred upon Muslim philosophers. It will take the form of an encyclopedia style entry to establish a foundation for researchers wishing to explore the achievements of Muslim philosophers.

Keywords—*Falsafa; Mesopotamia; Translation Movement; Prominent Muslim Philosophers; Classification of Sciences.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Locating masterpieces by Muslim philosophers in the field of philosophy is a challenge for several reasons: the interconnectedness between human knowledge as a discipline, and that this theme cannot be innovative. In addition, in order to understand the roots of philosophy within the Arab cultural environment and its development it is necessary to examine the history of Arab culture. Arab culture can trace its origins back thousands of years to the Mesopotamian, Pharaonic, and Saba and Himyar Civilizations.

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II. WHAT IS ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY?

A. Nature of Islamic philosophy

An interesting feature of Islamic philosophy is that there is no accepted definition for it. However, researchers have posed the following questions,

Is it primarily the sort of philosophy produced by Muslims?

Can we call Islamic philosophy, any philosophical discourse produced in Arabic?

Does Islamic philosophy examine the conceptual features of specifically Islamic issues?

Conclusions reached after discussion suggest that Islamic philosophy is best understood as the tradition of philosophy that arose from within the culture of Islam.¹

1 Leaman, Oliver,(1998), *Concept of Philosophy in Islam*, Routledge, London, website <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H006>

B. *Falsafa and hikma (Wisdom)*

Traditional Islamic methodologies were emphasized by the use of the term *falsafa*, an Arabic neologism designed to represent the Greek *philosophia*. Often, the familiar Arabic *hikma* was used. *Hikma* means wisdom and has a much broader meaning than *falsafa*.

A significant proportion of *kalam* (theology) can be classed as *hikma*, as would mysticism or Sufism. Whereas, much *falsafa* is defined as knowledge of existents, and wider conceptions within the discipline tend to use the term *hikma*. Philosophy as *hikma* is beneficial in that it refers to a wide range of conceptual issues within Islam. A good example of this conception of philosophy is the controversy over the *oriental philosophy (al-Hikmat al-Mashriqiyya)* of Ibn Sina (Avicenna)².

Ibn Sina defined wisdom as completing the human spirit with perception, based on belief in theoretical and practical facts according to human capacity³.

Al Kindi defined Philosophy as the science of learning about things, according to the capacity of man, where the scientific purpose of the philosopher is to locate and work to bring forth truth.⁴

Al-Farabi defined philosophy as the knowledge of assets.⁵

Ibn Rushd affirmed Aristotle's definition of philosophy, stating that it is regards the asset as an asset.⁶

III. SOURCES OF ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

The sources of philosophical thought for Muslim philosophers are numerous, and can be summarized as follows.

A. *Holy Quran*

The Holy Quran is considered the first source from which Muslim philosophers can derive their philosophy. The word

“wisdom” is mentioned in the Holy Quran, meaning the right or faithful science of reflection.

The influence of the Holy Quran on philosophizing lies in:

- Encouraging Muslims to privilege consideration and contemplation;
- Clarifying matters relevant to theology, such as the existence of Allah and His monotheism, resurrection, and the Day of Judgment; and
- Addressing spiritual aspects and the requirements of self and bodily discipline, which philosophers apply when discussing the subject of ethics.

B. *Ancient Civilizations in Arab Context*

1) *Ancient Egyptian Civilization*

The most important ideas derived from the Egyptian Civilization are:

- The idea of immortality, based on death followed by resurrection;
- The notion of reward and punishment and their connection with ethical rules;
- The difference between spirit and body, being that the body dies but the spirit remains immortal; and
- Achievements in art, architecture and governmental organization.

2) *Mesopotamia Civilization*

The most important ideas and advances derived from the Mesopotamian Civilization are:

- The search for the origin of the world and the development of a perception of the ocean or the sea which existed before the knowledge of heaven was given a name and before the earth was known;
- The first seed of monotheism in the domain of religion, and the first stone in the foundations of ethics, politics, law, science, mathematics, physics, and the arts;
- Invention of cuneiform writing;
- Development of the principles of algebra and geometry (they established the method for determining a square root).
- They developed the idea of universal nationhood. For Babylonians the universe includes everything that exists: human beings, animals and natural phenomena. All these elements are present in a given nation, and distinguished by measures of power; and
- The principles of astronomy.

3) *The thought of pre and post-Islam Cultural Schools*

Many schools of thought spread throughout the Arab-Muslim context, both before and after Islam arrived. The cultural modes disseminated by such schools played a significant role in forming the philosophical thought that manifested subsequently. These schools included:

2 Ibn Sina is well known as a creator of a Peripatetic philosophical system, one which came to have considerable significance within both Islamic and western philosophy. His book *Mantiq al-mashriqiyyin* (Logic of the Orientals) deals largely with logical differences between him and Aristotle.

3 Ibn Sina, (1980), *Letters in wisdom and Physics*, An investigation carried out by Abdul Rahman Badawy, Dar Al Kalem, Beirut, p 16.

4 Al Kindi, (1980), *Al Kindi Philosophical Letters*, An investigation carried out by Abdul Hadi Abu Ridah, Cairo, Egypt, part1, p 37.

5 AlFarabi; (1986) *Kitab al-jam baina rayai al-hakimain aflatun al-ilahi wa aristutalis* (The Book of Harmony Between the Ideas of the Two Sages, Plato the Divine and Aristotle), an investigation made by Albert Nasry Nader, Al Mashreq House, Beirut, Lebanon, p 80.

6 Ibn Rushd,(1994), *Letter on the Metaphysics*, An investigation carried by Gerard Ghami Dr Lebanon Thought, Beirut, p 30.

- The School of Alexandria;
- The school of Antioch in Aleppo;
- Edessa and Nusaybin Schools;
- Baghdad School;
- Jundishapur School; and
- Harran School.

All these schools were distinguished by their philosophical and religious aspect. They represented a cultural heritage which Muslim philosophers were able to trace to the conquest of the countries in which the schools were located. They learned from this cultural heritage, translating it from Syriac or Greek, into Arabic.⁷

4) Translation of philosophical texts

The translation movement began in the aforementioned cultural schools, as the majority of intellectuals translated philosophy and science from their different source languages into the language used in their schools. The translation of texts into Arabic became popular during the first Abbasid Caliphate, especially in the era of the Caliph al-Mamun. The most famous translators of philosophical texts are as follows:

- John Ibn Batriq (? – 815 CE): Translator of the Timaeus dialogue of Plato, Natural History, Heaven and World Book, Book of Animals and parts of the Book of Physics by Aristotle.
- Qusta ibn Luqa (820- 900 CE): Translator of Alexander d'Aphrodisias' Explanation of physics and Alexander's clarification of Aristotle's book of Universe and Corruption.
- Abdul Massiah ibn Abdullah Al Naamah Al Hamsi: Translator of "On Sophistical Refutations" by Aristotle, The explanation of Yehai al Nahwy for Physics, Athulogia's Aristotle which is an explanation of the fourth, fifth and sixth Enneads by Plotinus, not Aristotle.
- Hunayn ibn Ishaq (810- 873AC): Appointed by Caliph Al Mamun as head of Wisdom House in Baghdad. He was talented in Persian, Greek, Arabic and Syrian. His translations of Plato included; Politics, Dynamics and Timaeus. His translations of Aristotle included Categories, Alebara, Alquies, the Corruption, and Psyche.

7 More details see;

-Osel, Pol Masson (1945) East Philosophy, Translated by Mohammed Yousif Mousa, Egypt, Cairo.

Tomlen, O.F. (1980), East Philosophers, Translated by Abdul Halem Salem, Dar AlMarf, Egypt, Cairo.

-Saleh, Ahmad Ali, (1983) Iraq in the History, Dar AlHareah, Iraq, Baghdad.

-Hamaza, Abdul Kader (1970), Ancient Egyptian History, Egypt, Cairo.

- Ishaq Ibn Hunayn: He helped his father to administrate Wisdom House. He translated Plato's Protagoras and Aristotle's the Universe, the Corruption, Psyche and some of the Letters Book.

- Thabit ibn Qurra (826-900 CE): Translator of the Explanation of Physics by Aristotle.⁸

The translators not only translated the philosophers' original texts, but also translated explanations and clarifications written by their devotees. This body of work created a cultural resources for Muslim philosophers seeking to extend their knowledge and thought.

IV. THE MOST PROMINENT MUSLIM PHILOSOPHERS

- Ya'qub ibn Ishaq Al Kindi (801- 870 CE)
- Abu Nasr Muhammad Al Farabi (870- 950 CE)
- Abu Ali al Husayn ibn Abd Allah ibn Sina (980- 1037 CE)
- Mohammed ibn Mohammad Al Ghazzali (1059- 1111 CE)
- Abu Ali ibn Muhammad the famous physician, linguist and historian (? -1030 CE)
- Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariya ibn Yehai Al-Razi (865- 933 CE)
- Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Yahya ibn al Sayegh Ibn Bajjah (?- 1138 CE)
- Wali El Din Abdu Rahman bin Muhammad bin Khaldun (1332- 1406 CE)
- Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Abd Al Malik ibn Muhammad Ibn Tufail (?- 1185 CE)
- Abu Al-Walid Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Ahamd bin Rushd (1126- 1198 CE)

V. ACHIEVEMENTS OF MUSLIM PHILOSOPHERS

A. Evidence of the Modernity of the world

1) Cosmological proof

- It is based on a given phenomenon, such as time and place and endpoint with a justification neither in time nor place.
- Looking inward to the universe, degeneration, motion and attaining a conclusion, it is a variable that accepts no change.
- Dividing the world into two parts: the world as it is, and the possible world. The entire world is possible in terms of its existence and requires special providence

8 For more details see;

Nader, Alber Nasri (1986) His introduction to the (The Book of Harmony Between the Ideas of the Two Sages, Plato the Divine and Aristotle), p46-51.

to force it outward from the circle of possibility to that of existence; i.e. from the power to do, to the act of doing. This power necessitates the existence of Allah.

2) *Teleological Proof*

This is based on the belief that man makes things for a certain purpose, such as a pen, a car, and a house. If we regard the world from this point of view, we suggest that it was created to fulfil a specific aim. Accordingly, there must be a Wise Almighty God who created all these beings and developed the laws by which they function.

3) *Ontological Proof*

This is based on the doctrine that man, as a finite being, has an idea about the existence of infinite being. Therefore, this raises the question of how this notion entered the mind of man. The answer given is that it must have been Allah, glory to him, who was the source of such idea. If He does not exist, the idea would never have entered the human mind.

4) *Consensus Proof*

This demands an agreement between all nations and peoples, since the very beginning of man's emergence that there is an Almighty Creator. Throughout human history, in all states some people believed in the existence of a god who created and manages this world.

5) *Creational Proof*

This proof is based on the fact that Allah judges between people on the Day of Judgment, rendering rights to individuals according to their deeds in this life. Otherwise, there is a question over the value of man's deeds in this life if there is no reward or punishment for these in the hereafter.⁹

B. *Theory of Knowledge*

The theory of knowledge was discussed a long time ago, especially by the Greeks; certainly before the emergence of Islamic philosophy.

Muslim philosophers, similar to the Greeks, linked knowledge with existence. They considered the right knowledge is knowledge of divine existence. **Al Kindi** divided knowledge into three types; philosophical knowledge which belongs to the human mind; prophetic knowledge, which depends on revelatory power and absolute knowledge; and knowledge through taste or discovery which is linked with Sufism and is not subject to logical measurements.¹⁰

This led **Farabi** to divide knowledge into two categories: sensory and mental knowledge.¹¹

Ibn Sina allocated knowledge as either sensory or mental knowledge, or knowledge of taste.¹²

Al Ghazzali agrees with Ibn Sina on this division of knowledge; creating the designations, sensory knowledge, rational knowledge, and Sufi knowledge.¹³

Thus, Muslim philosophers' mastery of understanding proceeds from their analysis of knowledge, and the possibility that new items can be added (such as Sufi knowledge), and includes the application of sensory terminology not confining human senses to the usual five senses. They added other senses, which are particularly attributed to Al Kindi; i.e. the internal senses, the maintaining sense and the perceived sense. The maintaining sense describes impressions or sensations derived from what appears. The perceived sense is the interface between the mind and appearance. It takes some aspects from appearance and other aspects from the mind. From substance, it takes the perception of pictures, and from the mind, the realization of images which are semi-holistic.

C. *Mind Types*

There is agreement between all Muslim philosophers regarding the types of mind that disagree with Greek philosophers. For example, Aristotle divides the mind as follows: effective mind, material mind, and active mind, while Muslims allocate mind as follows:

- Material mind, which is the readiness and capacity of understanding and comprehension.
- Active mind which means considering power into deeds as a credible influence of mind arising when pursuing fulfillment.
- The beneficiary mind, which means following the transference of influence into action; the mind maintains reliable things that it perceives. Before such maintenance, there were no credible things. Such sound things are built-in, and rationalized through action.
- Effective mind: The mind that drives out the human mind from the non-static state to the action state. At which point the material mind becomes an actual and beneficiary mind.¹⁴

Therefore we can say that the achievement of Muslim philosophers was the addition of the beneficiary mind, or what is termed the 'apparent mind'. Furthermore, they considered the mind of one type and division as nominal. Accordingly, we

9 Most of Islamic sources mentioned these are proofs, see; -Sahms Aldean, Ahmed, (1990) AlFarabi, Life and his Philosophy, Dar of Scientific Book, Beirut, Lebanon, p 129. -Al Always, Hosam(1985), AlKindi Philosophy, Dar AlTaleah, Beirut, Lebanon, p 92-153.

10 Al Always, Hosam (1985), AlKindi Philosophy, p 25-64

11 Al-Tewail, Fawzi, (2002) AlFarabi Philosopher of Ideal City, Dar Modern Thought, Beirut, Lebanon, p83-88.

12 Ibn Sina, (1980), Letters in wisdom and Physics, p 17.

13 Al Ghazali,(1980), Al-Munqidh min-al-Dalal,(Deliverance from Error), An investigation carried out by Abdul Haleem Mahmood, Modern Book House, Egypt , Cairo, p.89.

14 For more details, see;

Al-Kindi, Al Kindi Philosophical Letters(Letter on Mind), Al Farabi,(Letter on Mind), Explained by Fawzi Ataewi in his book AlFarabi, p 75-79

present the following table to illuminate the opinions of philosophers regarding the mind.

TABLE I. MINDS

	1	2	3	4
Alaxandre	<i>Effective</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Asset</i>	-----
Al Kindi	Through deeds and action	Through power	Soul possession or the exist from power to action	The apparent of the spirit or the second or fourth
Al Farabi	Effective	Through power	Through action	Beneficiary
Ibn Sina	Effective	Material	Asset	Beneficiary
	This mind is out of spirit	These three minds are located in the Spirit. ¹⁵		

D. Classification of Sciences

The classification of science is based on the following:

- Determining origin and branch sciences;
- Defining connections between sciences; and
- The convergence of the scientist’s points of view in the context of narrow disciplines to reach an integrative theory.

In modern times, August Count classification of sciences transitioned from simple Science to complex science. It was concluded that sociology is among the most complicated sciences, and the importance of classifying sciences resides here. Al Kindi divided science into two segments: the first is religious and revelatory; and the second is divided into the human sciences, i.e. philosophy, which is divided into logic and mathematics. Mathematics include the science of numbers, geometry, astronomy and music. As for second sections, the sciences are required for themselves. There are two types; the theoretical, which includes physics, psychology, and metaphysics, and the practical; e.g. ethics and politics.¹⁶

Al Farabi, in the introduction to his book entitled *Science Statistics*, determined the intention of such classifications as “to count the famous sciences one by one and to learn the sum of what each of them contains and the parts of each of them as well as the total of the parts of each of them”¹⁷.

Jaber Ibn Hyaan divided science into two forms: the first being the knowledge of religion and the second the science of

15 Al Ahwani, Ahmed Fawed, (1985), AlKindi Arab Philosopher, Egyptian Foundation for Book, Cairo, p 271.
 16Al-Kindī , Abu Yūsuf Ya’qūb ibn ‘Ishāq aṣ-Ṣabbāḥ(1980) ‘Philosophical Letters’, An investigation carried out by Abdul Hadi Abu Ridah, part1 ,Cairo, Egypt, ,p37.

17 Al Farabi, (1968), Ehsan Al Elom (Sciences Counting), An investigation carried out by Ethman Amen, Cairo, p.53.

life. The knowledge of religion can be divided into scientific law and rational science. Rational science is then divided into letters science and semantics, and semantics is divided into philosophical and divine sciences¹⁸.

Ibn Sina introduced a definition of philosophy, which divided it into the theoretical and practical. The theoretical links to nature, mathematics, and heavenly science, whereas the practical is primarily concerned with ethics, housekeeping, and politics.¹⁹

Al- Ghazali began with defining science, which he termed positive science. He imposed conditions, such as clearance, distinction, and exposure.²⁰

This classification of sciences is considered among the achievements of Muslim philosophers, as they underpinned the development of modern sciences. Scholars should study all types of science, and develop a scheme for classifying sciences in the way they are presented by Muslim philosophers.

E. Philosophical terms

Philosophical terminology of various types was introduced in phases. The first phase was called the Genesis and is represented by Jaber ibn Hyaan and Al-Kindi. The second phase is called the determination and is characterized by al-Khwarizmi. The third phase is steadiness as signified by Ibn Sina and Al Ghazzali²¹.

These philosophers developed letters defining borders; i) Letter of limits by Jaber ibn Hyaan, ii) The letter of limits and drawings by Al-Kindi, iii) The letter of philosophical limits by al- Khwarizmi, iv) The letter of limits by Ibn Sina, and v) The letter of limits by Al Ghazzali.

These letters outline an Arabic philosophical vocabulary, to which each of the listed philosophers contributed over time. Today, we can say that these philosophers formed Arabic philosophy over the centuries during which it was prominent. Their terms are still used today, and function independently of other philosophical terms used in other languages.

F. In addition to the achievements

mentioned above, additional accomplishments and masterpieces are attributed to Muslim philosophers distinct from the knowledge bestowed by the philosophers of Greece, as summarized below:

18 Jaber Bin Haeen,(1984) Terms Letter, An investigation carried out by Al Asam, in his book Philosophical Term in the Arab World, New Thought Library, Iraq , Baghdad, p20.

19 Ibn Sīnā, Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Abd Allāh (1985) ‘ Letters in wisdom and Physics’ , Dar Al Arab Albestani, Beirut .

20 Al-Ghazālī Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad,(1990) ‘Faith Sciences’ , Dar Alkalm, Lebanon.

21 Al-Aesm, Abdul Amer (1984), Philosophical Term in The Arab World,p.89-90.

- Al-Razi disagreed with Aristotle about his suspicions against Galen. Al Razi stated that a vacuum is possible, while Aristotle said it is impossible because it is relates to place, and disagreed with him arguing that motion does not generate time, but reveals its passage.
- Arab intellectuals rejected Aristotle's expression of bodily collapse; as he thought that a heavy body would reach the ground within half the time that a light body would take to reach it. Al Khazzen in his book the *Balance of Wisdom* corrected this mistake affirming that gravity always draws objects to the centre of the earth.
- Ibn Sina proved the untruth of the Greek theory of vision; demonstration that vision takes place when a ray of vision comes out from eyes to the things.; demonstrating that vision arises when light reaches the eye.
- Ibn Al- Haytham challenged Euclid and Ptolemy on vision.
- Ibn Al- Nafis was famous for his criticisms of Galen.
- Thabit Ibn Qurra showed the imbalance of Ptolemy's table.
- Nasr el-Din Al Tousey, Al Abhari, Al-Tabrizi, and Ibn al Haytham corrected Euclid's sayings about the uniformity of a line parallel with another line. This led to modern Euclidian geometries.
- Ibn Bajjah disagreed with Aristotle regarding motion, and developed a new theory that some believe to have made possible Galileo's theories.
- Al Kindi argued with Aristotle about the eternity of the world, claiming that the world is neither eternal nor indefinite, as it had a beginning.
- Al Farabi argued that non-existence is material and distinguished it from being. Such arguments were refuted in Greek philosophy.
- Ibn Sina stated that a portion can always be divided.

- [7] Al-Ghazali,(1980), Al-Munqidh min-al-Dalal,(Deliverance from Error), An investigation carried out by Abdul Haleem Mahmood, Modern Book House, Egypt, Cairo.
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