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ARABIC PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy written in Arabic and in the Islamic world represents

one of the great traditions of Western philosophy.

Inspired by Greek philosophical works and the indigenous

ideas of Islamic theology, Arabic philosophers from the ninth

century onwards put forward ideas of great philosophical and

historical importance. This collection of essays, by some of

the leading scholars in Arabic philosophy, provides an introduction

to the field by way of chapters devoted to individual

thinkers (such as al-Fa¯ra¯bı¯, Avicenna, and Averroes) or

groups, especially during the ‘classical’ period from the ninth

to the twelfth centuries. It also includes chapters on areas of

philosophical inquiry across the tradition, such as ethics and

metaphysics. Finally, it includes chapters on later Islamic

thought, and on the connections between Arabic philosophy

and Greek, Jewish, and Latin philosophy. The volume also

includes a useful bibliography and a chronology of the most

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thought.

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included numerous articles on Avicenna and al-Ghaza¯ lı¯. They also

include editions and translations, including a facing-page translation

of al-Ghaza¯ lı¯’s *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (1997) andAvicenna’s

*Metaphysics* from *al-Shifa¯ ’* (forthcoming).

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(1998). He has also published articles on a number of Arab thinkers

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Notes on contributors xi

*“De Generatione et Corruptione”* (2001), and his edition of the

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*Making of the Avicennan Tradition* (2002) and editor of *Before and*

*After Avicenna* (2003).

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*the Word of God* and *Mulla Sadra: A Philosopher for Mystics?*

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*Shiism* (1993), *Ha¯mı¯d al-Dı¯n al-Kirma¯ nı¯* (1999), and *Exploring an*

*Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and Its Sources* (2002), along with

several editions and translations of important Islamic texts including

*A Guide to Conclusive Proofs for the Principles of Belief: Kita¯b alirsha*

*¯d ila¯ qawa¯t.*

*i‘ al-adilla fı¯ us. u¯ l al-i‘tiqa¯d* by al-Juwaynı¯ (2000) and

numerous articles on aspects of Isma¯ ‘ı¯lı¯ history and thought.

xii Notes on contributors

robert wisnovsky is Associate Professor in the Institute of

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hossein ziai is Professor of Islamic and Iranian Studies at UCLA.

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texts including Suhrawardı¯’s *Philosophy of Illumination*,

Shahrazu¯ rı¯’s *Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination*, and

Ibn Kammu¯ na’s *Commentary on Suhraward¯ı’s Intimations*.

note on the text

Please note that all names in this volume are given in full transliteration

(e.g., al-Fa¯ra¯bı¯, not Alfarabi or al-Farabi), except for Ibn Sı¯na¯ and

Ibn Rushd, where we defer to tradition and use the familiar Latinized

names Avicenna and Averroes. The same goes for all Arabic terms;

thus we write Ism¯ a‘¯ıl¯ı rather than Ismaili, Qur’¯an rather than Koran,

etc. We have generally followed the transliteration system used in

the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, but used the

simplest transliteration conventions possible: the feminine ending

*ta¯ ’ marbu¯t.*

*a* is always written –*a*, and the definite article is always

written *al-*.

There is a numbered bibliography at the end of this book. Chapter

authors refer both to items in this bibliography and to unnumbered

works specific to their chapters.

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chronology of major philosophers

in the arabic tradition

The following is a list of the dates of the major philosophers and

other authors in the Arabic tradition who are mentioned in this volume,

in approximate chronological order according to the date of

their death. The main sources used in compiling this set of dates

are *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* [16], Nasr and Leaman [34], and C.

Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, 5 vols. (Leiden:

1937–49). (Note that the dating of the *Epistles* of Ikhwa¯n al-S. afa¯ ’ is

disputed. For a discussion see *Encyclopaedia of Islam* [16], vol. II,

1072–3). Dates are given in A.H. (the Muslim calendar) followed by

C.E. Jewish authors’ dates are given in C.E. only. Dates elsewhere in

this volume are generally given in C.E. only. For conversion tables

between the two calendars, see G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, *The Muslim*

*and Christian Calendars*, 2nd edn. (London: 1977). Figures from

the twentieth century are not included here; for these thinkers see

chapter 19. The editors thank David Reisman for corrections and

suggestions.

Sergius of Resh‘ayna¯ (d. 536 C.E.)

Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ (d. 139/757)

Al-Muqammas., Da¯wu¯ d (early 9th c.)

Ma¯sha¯ ’alla¯h (d. ca. 200/815)

Ibn al-Bit.rı¯q (fl. ca. 200/815)

Abu¯ al-Hudhayl (d. ca. 226/840)

Al-Naz.z.a¯m (d. between 220/835 and 230/845)

Al-H. ims.ı¯, Ibn Na¯‘ima (fl. ca. 215/830)

Al-Kindı¯ (d. after 256/870)

Ibn Ish. a¯ q,H.

unayn (d. ca. 260/873)

Al-Balkhı¯, Abu¯ Ma‘shar (d. 272/886)

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Ibn Qurra, Tha¯ bit (d. 288/901)

IbnH.

ayla¯n, Yuh. anna¯ (d. 297/910)

IbnH.

unayn, Ish. ¯aq (d. 298/910–11)

Ibn Lu¯ qa¯ , Qust.a¯ (ca. 205/820–300/912)

Al-Jubba¯ ’ı¯, Abu¯ ‘Alı¯ (d. 303/915–16)

Al-Dimashqı¯, Abu¯ ‘Uthma¯n (d. early 4th/10th c.)

Al-Ra¯ zı¯, Abu¯ Bakr (d. 313/925)

Abu¯ Tamma¯m (4th/10th c.)

Al-Balkhı¯, Abu¯ al-Qa¯sim (d. 319/931)

Al-Jubba¯ ‘ı¯, Abu¯ Ha¯shim (d. 321/933)

Al-Ra¯ zı¯, Abu¯ H.

a¯tim (d. 322/934)

Al-Balkhı¯, Abu¯ Zayd (d. 322/934)

Al-Ash‘arı¯, Abu¯ al-H. asan (d. 324/935–6)

Ibn Yu¯ nus, Abu¯ Bishr Matta¯ (d. 328/940)

Gaon, Saadia (882–942)

Al-Nasafı¯, Muh.ammad (d. 332/943)

Al-Fa¯ra¯bı¯ (d. 339/950–1)

Israeli, Isaac (d. 955)

Ikhwa¯n al-S. afa¯ ’ (The Brethren of Purity) (4th/10th c.)

Al-Sijista¯nı¯, Abu¯ Ya‘qu¯ b (d. ca. 361/971)

Ibn ‘Adı¯, Yah. ya¯ (d. 363/974)

Al-Sı¯ra¯ fı¯, Abu¯ Sa‘ı¯d (d. 369/979)

Al-Sijista¯nı¯ (al-Mant.iqı¯), Abu¯ Sulayma¯n (d. ca. 375/985)

Al-Andalu¯ sı¯, Ibn Juljul (d. after 377/987)

Al-‘A¯ mirı¯ (d. 381/991)

Ibn al-Nadı¯m (d. either 385/995 or 388/998)

Ibn Zur‘a¯ , Abu¯ ‘Alı¯ ‘¯Isa¯ (d. 398/1008)

Al-Kirma¯nı¯,H.

amı¯d al-Dı¯n (d. ca. 412/1021)

‘Abd al-Jabba¯ r (d. 415/1024–5)

Ibn Miskawayh (d. 421/1030)

Avicenna (Ibn Sı¯na¯ ) (370/980–428/1037)

Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen) (d. ca. 432/1040)

Ibn al-T. ayyib, Abu¯ al-Faraj (d. 434/1043)

Al-Bı¯ru¯ nı¯ (d. 440/1048)

Ibn Gabirol, Solomon (Avicebron) (1021–58 or 1070)

IbnH.azm (d. 456/1064)

Ibn Marzuba¯n, Bahmanya¯ r (d. 459/1066)

IbnS.

a¯ ‘id al-Andalu¯ sı¯, Abu¯ al-Qa¯simS.

a¯ ‘id (d. 462/1070)

Ibn Mattawayh (d. 469/1076–7)

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Na¯s.

ir-i Khusraw (d. ca. 470/1077)

Al-Shı¯ra¯ zı¯, al-Mu’ayyad fı¯ al-Dı¯n (d. 470/1077)

Al-Juwayn¯ı, Im¯am al-H. aramayn (d. 478/1085)

Al-Lawkarı¯, Abu¯ al-Abba¯s (fl. 503/1109–10)

Al-Ghaza¯ lı¯, Abu¯ H.

a¯mid (450/1058–505/1111)

Al-Nasafı¯, Abu¯ al-Mu‘ı¯n (d. 508/1114–15)

Ibn Ba¯ jja (Avempace) (d. 533/1139)

Halevi, Judah (d. 1141)

Al-Baghda¯dı¯, Abu¯ al-Baraka¯ t (d. after 560/1164–5)

Ibn Da’ud, Abraham (ca. 1110–80)

IbnT.

ufayl (d. 581/1185–6)

Suhrawardı¯ (549/1154–587/1191)

Averroes (ibn Rushd) (520/1126–595/1198)

Al-Bit.ru¯ jı¯ (fl. ca. 600/1204)

Maimonides (1135 or 1138–1204)

Al-Ra¯ zı¯, Fakhr al-Dı¯n (d. 606/1210)

Al-Baghda¯dı¯, ‘Abd al-Lat.ı¯f (d. 628/1231)

Ibn ‘Arabı¯ (560/1165–638/1240)

Ibn Yu¯ nus, Kama¯ l al-Dı¯n (d. 639/1242)

Ibn al-Qift.ı¯ (d. 646/1248)

Falaquera, Shem-Tov (d. ca. 1295)

Al-Abharı¯, Athı¯r al-Dı¯n (d. 663/1264)

Ibn Ab¯ı Us.

aybi‘a (d. 668/1270)

Al-T. u¯ sı¯, Nas.ı¯r al-Dı¯n (d. 672/1274)

Al-Ka¯ tibı¯, Najm al-Dı¯n al-Qazwı¯nı¯ (d. 675/1276)

Ibn Kammu¯ na, Sa‘d al-Dı¯n (d. 1277)

Al-Bayd. a¯wı¯ (d. 685/1286 or 691/1292)

Al-Shahrazu¯ rı¯, Shams al-Dı¯n (d. after 688/1289)

Albalag, Isaac (late 13th c.)

Al-Shı¯ra¯ zı¯, Qut.b al-Dı¯n (d. 710/1311)

Al-H. illı¯, al-‘Alla¯ma (d. 726/1325)

Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728–9/1328)

Gersonides (Levi ben Gerson) (1288–1344)

Al-Is.faha¯nı¯, Mah.mu¯ d (d. 749/1348)

Al-¯Ijı¯ (d. 756/1355)

Ibn al-Khat.ı¯b (d. 776/1375)

Al-Tafta¯za¯nı¯, Sa‘d al-Dı¯n (d. 792/1390)

Ibn Khaldu¯ n (732/1332–808/1406)

Crescas,H.

asdai (d. ca. 1411)

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Is.faha¯nı¯, Ibn Torkeh (S. a¯ ’in al-Dı¯n) (d. ca. 836–7/1432)

Dashtakı¯,S.

adr al-Dı¯n (d. 903/1497)

Daww¯an¯ı, Jal ¯ al al-D¯ın (d. 907/1501)

Al-Dimashq¯ı, Muh.ammad b. Makk¯ı Shams al-D¯ın

(d. 937/1531)

Dashtakı¯, Ghiya¯th al-Dı¯n Mans.u¯ r (d. 949/1542)

Mı¯r Da¯ma¯d (d. 1041/1631)

MullaS.

adra¯ (S.

adr al-Dı¯n al-Shı¯ra¯ zı¯) (979/1571–1050/1640)

Al-La¯hı¯jı¯ (d. 1072/1661)

Sabziwa¯ rı¯ (d. 1289/1872)

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peter adamson and richard c. taylor

1 Introduction

The history of philosophy in Arabic goes back almost as far as Islam

itself. Philosophically interesting theological disputes were underway

within two centuries of the founding of Islam in 622 C.E. At

the same time some important scientific, medical, and philosophical

texts from the Greek tradition were being studied and used in the

Syriac tradition, with Aristotelian logic being employed in theological

debates. By the third century of the Muslim calendar (the ninth

century C.E.), a great translation movement centered inBaghdad was

in full bloom. In response, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish philosophers

writing in Arabic began to make important contributions to a

tradition of philosophizing that continues alive to the present day.

Debates and contests on logic, grammar, theology, and philosophy

by Muslims, Christians, and Jews took place at the caliphal court.

The structure and foundation of the cosmos, the natures of entities

in the physical world, the relation of human beings to the transcendent

divine, the principles of metaphysics, the nature of logic and

the foundations of epistemology, and the pursuit of the good life in

ethics – in sum, the traditional issues of philosophy, old wine, albeit

in new skins – were debated with intensity, originality, and penetrating

insight.

This was the beginning of what one might call the classical or

formative period of philosophy in Arabic, which goes from the ninth

to the twelfth centuries C.E. During this period, authors working

in Arabic received and reinterpreted the philosophical inheritance

of the Greeks, especially Aristotle. This process culminated at the

end of the classical period with the massive body of commentaries

on Aristotle by Averroes. But the formative period involves more

than just the continuation of the Greek philosophical tradition. Most

1

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important for the later Islamic tradition was the towering achievement

of Avicenna. He was one of many thinkers to grapple with

the ideas put forward by the tradition of theology in Islam (*‘ilm alkala*

*¯m*). Post-classical philosophy in Arabic would in turn be dominated

by the need to respond both to Avicenna and to the *kala¯m*

tradition. While Averroes’ project of explicating and exploiting the

works of Aristotle continued in Latin and Hebrew, other concerns

drove the development of post-classical philosophical inquiry.

In fact interesting philosophical ideas have appeared in the Islamic

world across a wide range of traditions and over a period of many

centuries. There is much of philosophical interest not only in the

obviously “philosophical” writings of authors like Avicenna, and in

the complex tradition of *kala¯m*, but also in works on the principles

of jurisprudence (*‘us.*

*u¯ l al-fiqh*), Qur’a¯nic commentary, the natural

sciences, certain literary (*adab*) works that are relevant to ethics,

contemporary political philosophy, and so on. It goes without saying

that the present volume cannot hope to cover such a broad range

of topics. For reasons made clear below, this *Companion* focuses

on the formative, classical period of philosophy in Arabic, though

we hope to convey a sense of the richness and complexity of the

tradition as a whole. In the present volume we take account especially

of three sorts of complexity that confront any student of the

classical period: the nature of the philosophical corpus received in

the Arabic-speaking world, the nature of Arabic philosophy in the

classical period itself, and the classical period as a foundation for a

continuous indigenous tradition of later philosophy.

the greek inheritance

One should not suppose that early Arabic philosophers, any more

than scholastic Christian philosophers, worked primarily through a

direct and independent reading of Aristotle. The most obvious reason

is that the outstanding “Aristotelian” philosophers in Islam all

had to read Aristotle in translation. This was made possible by the

aforementioned translation movement in the eighth–tenth centuries

C.E., which in a short space of time rendered a vast array of Greek

scientific and philosophical works into Arabic. It was made possible

by, among other things, the previous tradition of translation and

intellectual endeavor in Syriac, the ideologically motivated support

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of the ‘Abb¯asid caliphs, and, at a more mundane level, the invention

of paper.1 The translation movement was the single most important

impetus and determinant for the Arabic philosophical tradition.

It began to establish the technical vocabulary that would be

used (including the word *falsafa* itself, which is a calque from the

Greek *philosophia*) and, like the Latin translation movement centuries

later, it set forth the challenge of interpreting a Greek tradition

that included much more than just Aristotle. The authors of

the classical period also read commentaries on Aristotle and independent

works by Neoplatonists like Plotinus and Proclus, as well

as Greek science (especially medicine, but including a wide range of

sciences from physics to astrology).

We hope to draw attention to the decisive impact of the translation

movement by calling this a companion to Arabic, and not Islamic,

philosophy. It is *Arabic* philosophy because it is philosophy that

begins with the rendering of Greek thought, in all its complexity,

into the Arabic language. Note that it is not “Arab” philosophy: few

of the figures dealt with here were ethnically Arabs, a notable exception

being al-Kind¯ı, who was called the “philosopher of the Arabs”

precisely because he was unusual in this regard. Rather, philosophy

spread with the Arabic language itself throughout the lands of the

expanding Islamic empire.

Related to this are two more reasons why it is sensible to call the

tradition “Arabic” and not “Islamic” philosophy. First, many of those

involved were in fact Christians or Jews. Some of the most important

translators (above allH.

unayn b. Ish. ¯aq and his son) were Christians,

aswere such philosophers as Abu¯ BishrMatta¯ and Yah. ya¯ b. ‘Adı¯,who

along with the Muslim al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı were pivotal figures in the Baghdad

Peripatetic movement of the tenth century C.E. The intertwining of

the Jewish and Islamic philosophical traditions begins with ninth–

tenth century philosophers like Isaac Israeli and Saadia Gaon, and is

evident in the work of the famous Maimonides (see chapter 16).

Second, certainphilosophers of the formative period, like al-Kind¯ı,

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, and Averroes, were interested primarily in coming to grips

with the texts made available in the translation movement, rather

than with putting forward a properly “Islamic” philosophy. This

is not to minimize the importance of Islam for any of the figures

dealt with in this volume: even the Aristotelian commentator *par*

*excellence* Averroes, who was after all a judge and expert on Islamic

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law, dealt explicitly with the relationship between *falsafa* and Islam.

And once Avicenna’s philosophy becomes absorbed into the Islamic

*kala¯m* tradition, we can point to many self-consciously “Islamic”

philosophers. Still the term “Arabic” philosophy identifies a philosophical

tradition that has its origins in the translation movement.2

It is important to pay attention to the motives and procedures of this

movement – which texts were translated, and why? How were they

altered in translation? – rather than assuming the relatively straightforward

access to the Greek tradition we now take for granted. Some

sense of this complex and often rather technical set of issues is conveyed

below (chapters 2 and 3).

the classical period

Arabic philosophy in the formative classical period was not exclusively,

or even always primarily, “Aristotelian.” We can certainly

identify a dominantly Peripatetic tradition within the classical

period. It began in the tenth century C.E. with the school of the

aforementioned Abu¯ Bishr Matta¯ in Baghdad, and al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯ was its

first great representative. This tradition tended to see the practice of

philosophy as the task of explicating the works of Aristotle, and thus

reflected the Greek commentary tradition, especially the commentaries

produced by the Neoplatonic school at Alexandria. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı

imitated them in writing his own commentaries on Aristotle. His

lead was followed by the philosophers in Muslim Spain, or Andalusia

(see chapter 8), and the Arabic Peripatetic tradition reaches its

apex in the work of Averroes (chapter 9).

Yet the Greek inheritance included not only Aristotle and his commentators,

but also original works by Neoplatonists. In fact it is

impossible to draw a firm line between the impact of Aristotelianism

and the impact of Neoplatonism on Arabic philosophy. It is customary

to mention in this regard the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*,

which is in fact an interpretive paraphrase of the *Enneads* of Plotinus.

But even more important was the already well-established Neoplatonism

of the Aristotelian tradition itself: with the exception of

Alexander of Aphrodisias, all the important Greek commentators

on Aristotle were Neoplatonists. Neoplatonism was thus a major

force in Arabic philosophy, and we have accordingly emphasized it

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in the present volume. Chapters below show that the philosophical

curriculum inherited by the Arabic tradition was itself an artifact

of Neoplatonism (chapter 2), as well as how al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı made use of

this curriculum (chapter 4). A chapter on al-Kind¯ı emphasizes the

influence of the Neoplatonists in early Arabic thought (chapter 3),

while its later manifestations are made clear in the chapters on the

Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs, Avicenna, Suhraward¯ı, and on Ibn ‘Arab¯ı and MullaS.

adr¯a

(chapters 5, 6, 10, 11).

A third important strand of the classical tradition is the impact of

*kala¯m* on Arabic philosophical works. This too begins already with

al-Kind¯ı. And even those philosophers (al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and Averroes) who

were dismissive of *kala¯m* as, at best, a rhetorical or dialectical version

of *falsafa*, felt the need to respond to *kala¯m* authors. They were

provoked by the independent ideas of the *mutakallimu¯ n*: an example

of the productive interchange between *falsafa* and *kala¯m* can be

found here regarding physics (chapter 14). And they were provoked

by direct attacks on the philosophical tradition fromthe *kala¯m*viewpoint.

In this regard the outstanding figure is al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, still one of

the great theological authorities in Islam, and of particular interest

to us for both his adoption and his critique of philosophical ideas

(chapter 7). If not for space restrictions, one could certainly have

expanded this volume to include other authors who were critical of

the *falsafa* tradition, such as Ibn Taymiyya. Several additional chapters

would perhaps have been needed to do any justice to the philosophical

significance of *kala¯m*in its own right.3 But some of themain

themes, for example the problems of divine attributes and human

freedom, are explored here in discussing the reaction of philosophers

to *mutakallimu¯ n*.

All these factors are important for understanding the most important

achievement of the classical period: the self-consciously original

system of Avicenna, the greatest philosopher in this tradition. In

recognition of this we have here devoted a double-length chapter to

his thought (chapter 6). It shows that Avicenna needs to be understood

in the context of the classical period as we have described it: he

is heir to the Neoplatonic tradition in his understanding of Aristotle,

and engages directly with problematics from the *kala¯m* tradition as

well. Indeed, one way of viewing Arabic philosophy is as the tradition

that leads up to and stems from the work of Avicenna. Like Kant in

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the German tradition or Plato and Aristotle in the Greek tradition,

Avicenna significantly influenced everything that came after himin

the Arabic tradition.

the post-avicennian tradition

Admittedly, defining the Arabic philosophical tradition in this way

has the disadvantage that it tends to obscure those aspects of earlier

Arabic philosophy that Avicenna pointedly ignored.4 It is however

a very useful way to understand later Arabic philosophy. From the

time of Avicenna’s death in the eleventh century, all philosophical

work of note in Arabic responded to him, often critically. We have

already alluded to the critiques leveled fromthe *kala¯m*point of view.

Equally, Averroes criticized him from an Aristotelian point of view,

though Avicenna was a major influence for other Andalusians like

IbnT.

ufayl (see chapter 8). An important development of the late classical

period was yet another critique and adaptation of Avicenna: the

idiosyncratic thought of Suhraward¯ı, which inaugurated the tradition

known as Illuminationism (chapter 10).

The systems of Avicenna and Suhraward¯ı, an ongoing tradition

of *kala¯m*, and the mysticism of figures like Ibn ‘Arabı¯ provided the

major impetus to thinkers of the post-classical era. At this point the

translation movement was no longer the immediate spur to philosophical

reflection; this was rather provided by indigenous Muslim

authors. The post-classical era presents us with a forbidding corpus

of philosophical work, much of it unedited and unstudied by

Western scholars. In the present volume it has been possible only

to scratch the surface of this corpus, focusing on a few aspects of

the later tradition that are relatively accessible, that is, supported by

further secondary literature and some editions and translations. We

hope that, by devoting some attention to these later developments,

we may encourage the reader to inquire further into this period. It has

been remarked that the “Golden Age” of Arabic philosophy could be

said to begin only in the *post-*Avicennian era, with a vast number

of thinkers who commented or at least drew on Avicenna’s works.5

A companion to Arabic philosophy might look much different once

this material is more fully understood. For now, we have devoted particular

attention to the reception of Avicenna. Emphasis is placed on

Avicenna’s inheritance as well as his sources (chapter 6). Another

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chapter takes up the contentious issue of whether the strand of later

Avicennism represented by the great Persian thinker MullaS.

adr¯a can

really be called “philosophical,” given the mystical aspects ofS.

adr¯a’s

system (chapter 11). It shows that we can understand mysticism as

the practical complement of S.

adr¯a’s quite technical and theoretical

metaphysical reflections. The last chapter takes our historical narrative

down to the present, tracing the themes of later Arabic and

Persian philosophy from their roots in Illuminationism and S.

adr¯a’s

version of the Avicennian system (chapter 19). Together, chapters

10, 11, and 19 make the case that the later Illuminationist tradition,

which is often treated as dominated by mysticism and symbolic allegory,

actually has rational, philosophical analysis at its core.

This, then, is a rough guide to the historical coverage we aim

to provide in this *Companion*.6 Though such a historical summary

is needed to orient the reader, it must be said that our aims here

remain first and foremost philosophical. That is, we want the reader

to come away not just with a grasp of how this tradition developed,

but above all with an appreciation of the main ideas that were put

forward in the course of that development. Of course many of these

are canvassed in the chapters devoted to particular thinkers. But in

order to press the point home we have included five chapters on

general areas of philosophy ordered according to the late ancient

philosophical syllabus, which came down to the Arabic tradition (cf.

chapters 2 and 4): Logic, Ethics,7 Natural Philosophy or Physics, Psychology,

and Metaphysics.8 While some repetition with earlier chapters

has been unavoidable, these thematic chapters explore certain

topics not dealt with elsewhere (see especially the chapters on logic

and physics) and put other topics in a broader context tracing philosophical

developments through the tradition. Many of the themes

raised will be familiar to students of Christian and Jewish medieval

philosophy. This is, of course, not accidental, since as already mentioned

Christian and Jewish philosophers in the Middle Ages were

thoroughly engaged with the Arabic tradition. The impact of Arabic

philosophy on scholastic Latin philosophy is an enormous topic in

its own right, one that has been explored to some extent in other

*Companions*.9 Chapter 18 explains the historical background of this

influence, detailing the transmission of Arabic philosophical work

into Latin, just as chapter 2 explains the transmission of Greek philosophy

into Arabic.

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Arabic philosophy is of course far too complex to be explored comprehensively

in a volume of this size. While the foregoing gives our

rationale for the focus and scope of the volume, we are not dogmatic:

it is easy to think of philosophers in this tradition who would have

merited a chapter of their own in this volume, and easy to think

of ways of expanding the scope both historically and thematically.

However, in the first instance our goal here is not to be thorough. It

is rather to invite readers to the study of Arabic philosophy, giving

them a basic grounding in some of the main figures and themes, but

also a sense of what is most philosophically intriguing about this

tradition.

notes

1 See Gutas [58].

2 For this way of defining the tradition, see D. Gutas, “The Study of

Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century,” *British Journal ofMiddle*

*Eastern Studies* 29 (2002), 5–25.

3 Useful studies of *kala¯m* for those interested in its philosophical significance

include the following: B. Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology: Traditionalism*

*and Rationalism* (Edinburgh: 1998); R. M. Frank, “Remarks

on the Early Development of the Kalam,” *Atti del terzo congresso di*

*studi arabi e islamici* (Napoli: 1967), 315–29; R.M. Frank, “The Science

of Kal¯am,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 2 (1992), 7–37; D. Gimaret,

*Th´eories de l’acte humain en th´eologiemusulmane* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1980);

van Ess [44]; Wolfson [48].

4 These include the Neoplatonism of the Isma¯ ‘ı¯lı¯s, and of al-‘A¯ mirı¯

and the school of al-Sijist ¯an¯ı (for citations on this see below,

chapter 3 n. 33), in addition to such unorthodox thinkers as Abu¯ Bakr

al-R¯az¯ı, whose unique system had little influence on the later tradition

(for bibliography on al-R¯az¯ı see below, chapter 13 n. 8).

5 See Gutas, “The Study of Arabic Philosophy,” and also Gutas [94]. For

an even more daunting assessment of the number of later philosophical

works, see Wisnovsky [261].

6 Two overviews of the Arabic tradition have appeared recently in other

*Companions*: see Druart [13] and Kraemer [27].

7 Our understanding that metaphysical and epistemological principles are

foundational in Arabic philosophy for ethical and political ideas is not

shared by all contributors to this volume. A different methodological

approach inspired by the thought of Leo Strauss is central to the writings

of a number of colleagues, among them Muhsin Mahdi and Charles

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Butterworth, who have contributed editions, translations, and books

and articles of analysis to the field. Chapter 13 by Charles Butterworth

follows that approach. For other work in this vein, see the bibliographical

citations at the end of the volume under “Ethics and Politics.”

8 See for instance Ammonius, *Commentary on the Categories*, 5.31–6.22.

Ethics is actually a propaedeutic science in the late ancient curriculum,

but Ammonius states that logic is to be studied first, because Aristotle

uses it in the course of developing his arguments in the *Ethics*. Psychology

is for Aristotle a part of natural philosophy, though it was often

treated as a bridge between physics and metaphysics. We separate it off

because of its distinctive importance in the Arabic tradition. See further

L. G. Westerink, “The Alexandrian Commentators and the Introductions

to their Commentaries,” in *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient*

*Commentators and their Influence*, ed. R. Sorabji (London: 1990), 325–

48. For versions of the curriculum in the Arabic tradition see below,

chapters 2 and 4, Gutas [56], and Rosenthal [39], 52–73.

9 See especially D. Burrell, “Aquinas and Islamic and Jewish Thinkers,”

in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. N. Kretzmann and E.

Stump (Cambridge: 1993), 60–84, and also the *Companions* to Duns

Scotus and Medieval Philosophy.

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cristina d’ancona

2 Greek into Arabic:

Neoplatonism in translation

salient features of late ancient philosophy

*Plotinus: a new reading of Plato*

During the imperial age, in many centers of the Roman world, philosophy

was taught in close connection to the doctrines of the great

philosophers of the past: Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno. Not only in

Rome, Athens, Alexandria, but also in Pergamon, Smyrna, Apamea,

Tarsus, Ege, Aphrodisias in the east of the empire, Naples and

Marseille in the west, a “school” of philosophy disseminated either

Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, or Epicureanism. Against this

background, the thought of Plotinus represented a turning point in

the history of philosophical ideas which was to play a decisive role

in the creation of *falsafa* and to influence indirectly philosophy in

the Middle Ages, in both Latin and Arabic.

Coming from Alexandria, where he studied Platonism under the

guidance of Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus arrived in Rome (244 C.E.)

and opened a school. From his explicit claims, as well as the content

of his treatises, we know that he was a Platonist and taught

Platonism, but also took into account the doctrines of the other

philosophers, especially Aristotle. As we learn from the biography

that Porphyry prefaced to the edition of Plotinus’ works, in the daily

meetings of the school the treatises of Aristotle, accompanied by

their commentaries – especially those by Alexander of Aphrodisias –

were read before Plotinus presented his lecture. This was nothing

new: it was customary among the Platonists of that age to compare

Plato and Aristotle, either in the hope of showing that they did not

disagree on the basic issues orwith the aimof arguing that Aristotle’s

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criticisms were erroneous and merely polemical. Still, Plotinus cannot

be ranged under the heading either of the “anti-Aristotelian” or

of the “pro-Aristotelian” Platonists. He is neither, because some of

his key doctrines are grounded in Aristotle’s thought – as is the case

with his identification of divine Intellect and self-reflexive thinking.

At the same time he does not hesitate to criticize Aristotle sharply

on other crucial issues, for instance Aristotle’s doctrine of substance

and his related account of the “categories” of being, whose incompatibility

with Platonic ideas about being and knowledge was obscured

in the accounts of the “pro-Aristotelian” Platonists.

Plotinus’ Platonism is rooted in the Platonic tradition and in the

doctrines of what we call Middle Platonism, but he initiated a new

age in the history of philosophical thought. As a Platonist, he is convinced

that soul is a reality apart from body and that it knows the

real structure of things, whereas sense-perception uses bodily organs

and only grasps a changing, derivative level of reality. Still, Plotinus

is fully aware of Aristotle’s criticisms and crafts a doctrine of soul

that takes them into account. Soul is closely related to the body to

which it gives life, but this does not imply that its cognitive powers

depend upon bodily organs: a “part” of soul constantly has access to

the intelligible structure of things and provides the principles of reasoning.

However, soul is by no means only a cognitive apparatus: it

counts also as the immanent principle of the rational organization of

the body, as its life, and it links together the two worlds of being and

becoming that Plato distinguished from one another in the *Timaeus*.

Plotinus makes soul – both of the individual living body and of the

body of the universe – a principle rooted in intelligible reality, and

yet also the immanent cause of the rational arrangement of visible

reality.

The nature of intelligible reality itself is also explored by Plotinus.

On the one hand, he takes for granted the Platonic distinction

between intelligible and visible reality; on the other hand, he directly

addresses the objections raised by Aristotle against the theory of

participation, Plato’s chief explanation of the relationship between

being and becoming. In Plotinus’ eyes, Aristotle failed to follow his

own methodological rule of making use in each field of the epistemic

principles appropriate to it. Since Aristotle conceived of the Platonic

Forms as if they were individuals like those of the visible world, he

raised a series of objections – among them, the famous Third Man

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argument – that are completely beside the point if one takes into

account their real nature. Plotinus’ interpretation of the Platonic

intelligible world would be of paramount importance for the development

of *falsafa*. The Forms are not general concepts arbitrarily

endowed with substantiality. They do not share in the nature of the

things named after them (the intelligible principle that makes things

triangular is not a triangle). Nor do they simply duplicate items in the

sensible world without explaining them, as Aristotle had charged.

On Plotinus’ interpretation, which owes much to Aristotle’s own

account of the divine Intellect in book Lambda of the *Metaphysics*,

the Forms are the intelligible principles of all that exists, identical in

nature with the divine Intellect. This Intellect is both the Platonic

Demiurge of the *Timaeus* myth and the *nous* that Aristotle located

at the peak of that well-ordered totality which is the cosmos. Assuming

the Platonic identification of intelligible reality with true being,

Plotinus makes this intelligible being coincide with the divine intellectual

principle described in the *Timaeus*. But he also endorses the

Aristotelian account of the highest level of being as a motionless,

perfect, and blessed reality whose very nature is self-reflexive thinking.

Being, Intellect, and the Forms are, in Plotinus’ interpretation of

Greek philosophy, one and the same thing: in his eyes, Parmenides,

Plato, and Aristotle were in substantial agreement on this point, even

though it was Plato who provided the most accurate account of it.

On other crucial issues, however, Plotinus thinks that there was

no such agreement. In particular, Aristotle was at fault when he

argued that this divine Intellect is the first principle itself. Plotinus

accepts Aristotle’s analysis of the highest level of being as selfreflexive

thinking, although he contends that such a principle cannot

be the first uncaused cause of all things. What is absolutely first

must be absolutely simple, and what eternally thinks itself cannot

meet this requirement. Not only must it be dual as both thinker and

object of thought, but as object of thought it is intrinsically multiple,

since it is identified with the whole range of Platonic Forms. For

this reason, Plotinus is unhappy with Aristotle’s account of the first

principle as self-reflexive thinking; but he is unhappy also with the

traditionalMiddle Platonic solution to the problem of naming Plato’s

first principle. It is well known that this question is left unanswered

in Plato’s dialogues. At times Plato suggests that there is a principle

of the Forms, but he never addresses this problem directly. Possibly

under the influence of Aristotle’s theology, the Middle Platonists

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tended to identify the Good (which counts in the *Republic* as the

principle of the Forms) with the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*, that

divine Intellect which is said to be “good.” Plotinus instead interprets

the Good of book VI of the *Republic* as being identical with

the “one” discussed in the second half of the *Parmenides*: if it is

said “to be,” it must be admitted to be multiple. For this reason the

One lies, according to Plotinus, “beyond being,” like the Good of

the *Republic*. Even though the One was also conceived of as the first

principle in second-century Neopythagoreanism, the move of conflating

the Good of the *Republic*with the “one” of the *Parmenides* is

unprecedented in the Platonic school, and allows Plotinus to claim

that the core of his philosophy, namely, the doctrine of the three

principles One-Good, Intellect, and Soul, is an exegesis of Plato’s

own thought. This doctrine will play a pivotal role in the formation

of Arabic philosophy and lastingly influence it.

*Post-Plotinian Platonism: from the “harmony between*

*Plato and Aristotle” to the late antique corpus*

*of philosophical texts*

As we learn from Porphyry, for ten years after the opening of the

school Plotinus taught only orally, writing nothing. Then, Plotinus

began to write treatises and did so until his death in 270 C.E. Thanks

to Porphyry, we know about Plotinus something which is usually

very hard to know about an ancient philosopher: the precise chronology

of his writings. The sequence itself does not show any concern

for propaedeutics, and this is confirmed by Porphyry’s remarks in

the *Life of Plotinus* about the “disorder” of these discussions and

the resulting disconcertion of Plotinus’ audience. His treatises must

have appeared irksome to use and put in order, even apart from their

intrinsic complexity. Porphyry himself reports that he composed

summaries and notebooks on them, and we still possess a sort of

companion to Plotinian metaphysics by him, the *Launching Points*

*to the Realm of Mind*. The *Enneads*, an edition of Plotinus’ treatises

that Porphyry compiled some thirteen years after Plotinus’ death,

is an imitation of Andronicus of Rhodes’ systematic arrangement of

Aristotle’s works, as Porphyry himself tells us.

Porphyry was also influenced by the traditional Middle Platonic

reading order of Plato’s dialogues. His arrangement of the Plotinian

treatises in the *Enneads* clearly echoes the model that has Platonic

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education begin with the question of the essence of “man,” dealt

with in the *First Alcibiades*. In fact, as Pierre Hadot has shown, the

Porphyrian arrangement is by no means neutral: the ascent from ethical

to cosmological topics (*Enneads* I–III) and then to metaphysical

issues (*Enneads* IV–VI) is reminiscent of the subdivision of the parts

of philosophy into ethics, physics, and metaphysics (or theology),

a pattern derived from the tradition of pre-Plotinian Platonism in

which Porphyry had been educated in Athens by Longinus, before he

came to Rome.1 Henri Dominique Saffrey has pointed out that Porphyry

also felt the need to counter Iamblichus’ claim that salvation

cannot be reached through philosophy alone, but requires “theurgy,”

the rituals of the purification and divinization of soul revealed by

the gods themselves.2 According to Iamblichus, revelations from the

gods and the rituals of Egyptian religion convey a more ancient

and perfect truth than philosophy does. More precisely, philosophy

itself is a product of this original revelation, because the gods taught

Pythagoras, and all Greek philosophy followed in Pythagoras’ footsteps.

Since soul is sunk in the world of generation and corruption,

only divinely revealed rituals can give it true salvation. But Porphyry

makes his edition of the Plotinian writings culminate in the treatise

*On the One, or the Good* (VI 9 (9)). Here we are told that soul can

know the First Principle as the result of its philosophical research

about the causes and principles of all things. Plotinus’ authority supports

Porphyry’s final allegiance to the tradition of Greek rationalism.

By the same token, the *Enneads* become an ascent from the

anthropological-ethical questions dealt with at the beginning to the

final claim that our individual soul can reach the First Principle

itself, the One or Good.

Porphyry was responsible for more than this systematic reshaping

of Plotinus’ thought. He also made a move of paramount importance

in the history of medieval thought, both in the West and the East:

he included Aristotle’s works, and especially the logical treatises

(the *Organon*), in the Neoplatonic curriculum. For the first time, a

Platonist wrote commentaries on Aristotle.3 Porphyry also provided

an introduction to Aristotle’s logic, the well-known *Isagoge*.4 The

aimof showing that the two great masters of Greek philosophy were

in agreement (as runs the title of the lost work *On the Fact that the*

*Allegiance of Plato and Aristotle is One and the Same*) might have

had something to do with this exegetical activity. Indeed, it has also

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been argued that on this point Porphyry deliberately parted company

with Plotinus – who did not conceal his opposition to some crucial

tenets of Aristotle’s thought – and that this explains Porphyry’s move

from Rome to Sicily.5 Two centuries later, when Boethius came to

the idea of translating into Latin all the Aristotelian and Platonic

writings in order to show their mutual harmony, he was endorsing

a model traceable to Porphyry, and still practiced in Boethius’ day

in Greek Neoplatonic circles. Boethius’ project does not begin with

Plato (as would seem natural to us for chronological reasons) but

with Aristotle and, more precisely, with the *Organon*, introduced by

Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. Something very similar happens in the Arabicspeaking

world: the *Isagoge* is considered the beginning of the philosophical

instruction even in the time of Avicenna.6

To account for this similarity requires following the transmission

to the Arabic-speaking world of the model outlined by Porphyry,

and developed in the schools of late antiquity. In the Greek-speaking

world, it is possible to follow the main lines of the development of a

proper curriculum of philosophical studies in the form of a series of

guided readings. But it is less certain how this pattern was transmitted

to the Arab philosophers. We have just seen that Porphyry gave

a significant impetus toward the creation of a curriculum which

included Aristotle as a part of the progressive learning of the philosophical

truth. Iamblichus too agreed that Aristotle and Plato were

the two great representatives of ancient Greek wisdom and commented

upon Aristotle’s *Categories* and *Prior Analytics*. In addition,

we learn from a later Alexandrian source that he worked out

a “canon” of the main Platonic dialogues to be read in sequence.

Two dialogues represented in his eyes the sum of Plato’s teaching

about cosmos and the gods: the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*.7

The approximately 100 years which separate Iamblichus’ teaching in

Apamea and the renewal of the Platonic studies in Athens, in the first

decades of the fifth century, are silent about the curriculum of the

Platonic schools. But with Syrianus, the teacher of Proclus, we meet

a full-fledged curriculum of philosophical studies, which included

both Aristotle and Plato. Studying Aristotle was seen as a preliminary,

meant to lead from logic to physics to metaphysics, and the

subsequent exposition of supreme theological truth was entrusted to

Plato. As we learn from Marinus of Neapolis, Syrianus first taught

Proclus Aristotle for two years, before moving on to Plato.8 Even

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though there is no direct evidence that Syrianus’ courses on Plato’s

dialogues followed the sequence of the Iamblichean “canon,” the

fact that all the Platonic commentaries by Proclus are devoted to

dialogues from this sequence, with the three major ones devoted to

its beginnings and end (*First Alcibiades*, *Timaeus*, *Parmenides*),9 suggests

that the Platonic education in Athens was imparted according

to this model, while basic education was provided through a guided

reading of Aristotle’s corpus.

In fifth–sixth-century Athens, philosophy appears more and more

as a systematic whole, its study guided by a canon of authoritative

works, including both Aristotle and Plato. The peak of the philosophical

curriculum is no longer metaphysics, but theology, i.e., a

philosophical discourse about the divine principles, whose sources

lie first and foremost in the revelations of late paganism10 and then

in Plato’s dialogues, allegorically interpreted as conveying his theological

doctrine. But Proclus did not just comment upon Plato’smain

dialogues. He also wrote a huge treatise on systematic theology, the

*Platonic Theology*,11 and collected all the theological truths, in the

form of axioms, into a companion modeled on Euclid’s *Elements of*

*Geometry*: the *Elements of Theology*.12 Both the *Platonic Theology*

and the *Elements of Theology* beginwith the One, the First Principle.

Departing from Plotinus, who was convinced that the suprasensible

causes were but three – the One-Good, Intellect, and Soul – the two

Proclean works expound the procession of multiplicity from the One

as the derivation of a series of intermediate principles, first between

the One and the intelligible being, then between the intelligible being

and the divine Intellect (and intellects), and then between the divine

Intellect and the divine Soul (and souls). For Proclus, an entire hierarchy

of divine principles lies both outside the visible universe and

within it, and the human soul, fallen into the world of coming-tobe

and passing away, can return to the First Principle only through

the “appropriate mediations.”13 The pagan cults, offered as they are

to the intra-cosmic and the hypercosmic gods, vindicate true religion

against Christianity and show how soul can ascend toward the

“appropriate mediations.” Philosophy, insofar as it celebrates the

truly divine principles of the visible cosmos, is prayer.

At the end of the fifth century and during the sixth, within a

Christian environment both in Alexandria and in Athens, the Neoplatonic

schools continued to comment upon Aristotle and Plato.

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To some extent, one may also venture to say that it was one and

the same school, unified by travel and personal ties between the two

cities.14 Yet there is a difference of emphasis. The focus of the philosophical

debate in sixth-century Alexandria appears to have shifted

significantly toward Aristotle,15 even though the Neoplatonic pagan

philosophers continued to adhere to the theological doctrines worked

out within the school. Ammonius, who received his education in

Athens and lectured in Alexandria chiefly on Aristotle,16 had as his

pupils both John Philoponus and Simplicius. The latter went also

to Athens, where he studied under the guidance of Damascius.17

Simplicius’ exegetical work allows us to grasp the continuity and

innovations of the philosophical curriculum in late antiquity. The

anthropological-ethical propaedeutics supplied in Iamblichus’ canon

by the *First Alcibiades* are for him provided instead by Epictetus’

*Encheiridion*, uponwhich he comments at length.18 The Aristotelian

commentaries that have come down to us19 follow the post-Plotinian

tradition of reading Aristotle’s logic and cosmology as fitting perfectly

with Plato’s metaphysical doctrine. But, departing from the

model inherited by Syrianus, theological discussion is no longer

entrusted to the allegorical commentary on Plato’s dialogues, upon

which Simplicius does not comment.Aplausible explanation for this

fact is the pressure of the Christian environment. Especially after

529, the date of a ban on public teaching by philosophers of pagan

allegiance,20 it would have been daring to give courses on the “theological”

dialogues by Plato, whose interpretation, especially after

Proclus, was strongly committed to polytheism.21 To this, another

explanation might be added for the prima facie astonishing fact that

late Neoplatonism is mostly focused on commenting on Aristotle,

rather than on Plato: the pivotal role played by Aristotle in the debate

between pagans and Christians, best exemplified by the argument

between Simplicius and John Philoponus over whether the cosmos

is eternal or created.

John Philoponus is to some extent a dilemma for historians.

His twofold activity as Neoplatonic commentator of Aristotle

and as Christian theologian and polemicist against both Aristotle

and Proclus22 is a much-debated problem.23 This point is directly

relevant to the formative period of *falsafa* in two ways: first,

Philoponus’ anti-eternalist arguments were to have a paramount

importance for al-Kind¯ı (see chapter 3); second, the polemic itself

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is proof of the fact that philosophical debate, in the last stages of

the Neoplatonic schools, had Aristotle as its main, albeit not exclusive,

focus. The last Neoplatonic commentators in Alexandria wrote

on Aristotle (Elias, David, Stephanus of Alexandria). At the end of

antiquity, especially in the Alexandrian area which was to fall under

Islamic rule shortly thereafter, Aristotle was seen as the unexcelled

master of scientific learning in logic, physics, cosmology, natural

science, and psychology. The architecture of theoretical knowledge

was no longer crowned by the theological interpretation of Plato’s

dialogues. Between the second half of the sixth century and the

first decades of the seventh, in Alexandria, Aristotle is not yet credited

with a Neoplatonic theology, as he would be in ninth-century

Baghdad in the circle of al-Kind¯ı. But everything is ready for his taking

on the mantle of “First Teacher.”

the transmission of neoplatonic philosophy

to the arabic-speaking world

*The schools*

In 529, as a consequence of Justinian’s closing of the Platonic school,

Simplicius, Damascius, and five other philosophers left Athens and

went to Persia, at the court of Chosroes I Anu¯ shirwa¯n,24 where they

remained until 532. This was by no means the first penetration of

Greek philosophy in the east: indeed, the fact that the Sassanian

emperor was deeply interested in philosophy was the reason for

the Neoplatonic philosophers to join him in Ctesiphon. Priscianus

Lydus, one of the philosophers who came from Athens, wrote a treatise

for him, and one of Paul the Persian’swritings onAristotle’s logic

is dedicated to him.25 But, notwithstanding the favorable attitude of

the Sassanian court toward Greek learning,26 the first dissemination

of philosophy in the Mesopotamian area did not occur in Pahlavi,

as a consequence of the interest of the Sassanian dynasty in the foreign

sciences, but in Syriac, as a consequence of the necessities of

theological discourse.

Before Arabic, the first Semitic language into which the

Greek philosophical texts were translated was Syriac – originally an

Aramaic dialect, which was soon used for literary and philosophical

works.27 In the biblical school at Edessa, the exegetical works

of Theodor of Mopsuestia were translated from Greek into Syriac

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within the first half of the fifth century, either by Qiore (died 428) or

by Hibas (died 475).28 According to the testimony of Jacob of Edessa

(died 708), together with the biblical commentaries by Theodor,

Aristotle’s *Categories* arrived in the school to be translated into

Syriac and serve the purposes of exegesis and teaching.29 But soon

Aristotle’s logical works were commented upon in themselves, along

the lines of the movement which Sebastian Brock has called a process

“from antagonism to assimilation” of Greek learning.30 The

key figure in the transmission of Aristotle’s logic, along with its

Neoplatonic interpretation, is Sergius of Resh‘ayn¯a (died 536), a

physician and philosopher who received his education in Alexandria

and, in addition to writing commentaries on and introductions

to Aristotle’s logical works, translated into Syriac many treatises

by Galen, the writings of the pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, possibly

the *Centuries* by Evagrius Ponticus, and the treatise *On the*

*Principles of the All* attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias. Henri

Hugonnard-Roche has shown the close relationship between Sergius’

presentation of Aristotle and the Alexandrian curriculum.31 He also

remarks that, while in the Neoplatonic curriculum the Aristotelian

corpus was meant to provide an introduction to Plato’s dialogues,

for Sergius it is the sum of philosophy as demonstrative science.32 In

this, Sergius is following in the footsteps of the Alexandrian developments

outlined above.

Another center of learning, the Nestorian school inNisibi founded

by the bishop Barsawma (died 458), gave room to Greek philosophy.

Paul the Persian,whomwehave already met at the court of Chosroes I

Anu¯ shirwa¯n toward the middle of the sixth century, may have had

something to dowith this school. What lies beyond doubt is that, like

Sergius, he inherited the late Neoplatonic classification of Aristotle’s

writings best exemplified at Alexandria, as is shown by two extant

writings by him.33 Other Syriac commentators on Aristotle, like

Proba (sixth century), who commented upon the *Isagoge*, *De Interpretatione*,

and *Prior Analytics*,34 endorsed the model worked out

by Sergius of Resh‘ayn¯ a, creating in this way a Syriac tradition

of Aristotelian logic – translations, companions, commentaries –

which was to play an important role in the rise and development

of *falsafa*. Later on, in the seventh century, a school appended to

the monastery of Qenneshr¯ın (Chalcis) became a center of Greek

learning under the impetus of the bishop Severus Sebokht (died 667).

Here too, Aristotle’s logical works, introduced by Porphyry’s *Isagoge*,

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appear as the core of demonstrative science. Athanasius of Balad (died

687), Jacob of Edessa, and George of the Arabs (died 724)35 provided

new translations of the logical corpus created in late antiquity, i.e.,

the *Isagoge* and the *Organon*. Even under the ‘Abb¯asid rule, in the

eighth and ninth centuries, the Christians of Syria were the unexcelled

masters of Aristotelian logic: the caliph al-Mahd¯ı (reigned 775–

85) asked Timoteus I, the Nestorian *katholikos*, to provide a translation

of the *Topics*.36 In ninth-century Baghdad, and even later on,

Syriac-speaking Christians carried on a tradition of logical learning

in close relationship with the Arab *fala¯ sifa*.37

Max Meyerhof, relying on al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı,38 worked out the so-called

path “from Alexandria to Baghdad” in order to account for the transmission

of Greek science and philosophy to the Arabic-speaking

world.39 Dimitri Gutas has pointed out that al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s account is

to be taken less as a historical report than as an attempt at gaining

credit for Islamic culture as the legitimate heir of Greek learning,

worthy of being the repository of that heritage which the Byzantine

rulers were no longer able to understand and exploit because of

their allegiance to the Christian faith.40 But this should not obscure

the intrinsic dependence of the rising Syriac and Arabic philosophical

tradition on the Alexandrian model of philosophy as systematic

learning, organized around a corpus of Aristotelian texts introduced

by Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. Such a model is still at work in the Arabic

literary genre of the “introductions to philosophy”41 and shows the

close relationship between the rise of *falsafa* and the way in which

philosophy was conceived of in the Neoplatonic schools at the end

of antiquity. Obviously, Alexandria, Antioch, Edessa, Nisibi, Qenneshrı

¯n, and Jundı¯sa¯bu¯ r were not the only centers where philosophy

was studied and taught: many others disseminated Greek learning,

such as Marw, in Khur¯as¯an, andH.

arr ¯an.42 One cannot claimthat the

Alexandrian model was exclusive or even dominant everywhere. But

the available data points towards its being the main pattern for the

understanding of what philosophy was, and how it was to be learnt,

in the Arabic tradition.

*The translations*

The rise of the ‘Abb¯asid dynasty and the foundation of Baghdad

(762 C.E.) mark a turning point in Islamic culture. A proper

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movement of translation began and developed into a systematic

assimilation of Greek scientific and philosophical learning.43 Acomprehensive

account of the scientific fields covered by the activity of

the translators, of the stages of assimilation of Greek materials, and

of the different styles of translations has been provided by Gerhard

Endress.44 Against this background, the role of Greek Neoplatonism

appears to be crucial: the fact that Plotinus’ *Enneads* and Proclus’

*Elements of Theology* were among the first works translated into

Arabic had long-termconsequences for the entire development of *falsafa*.

These two basic texts of Greek Neoplatonism were translated

into Arabic by the same group that also produced the first Arabic

translations of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and *De Caelo*: the circle of

al-Kind¯ı (ninth century). We owe to Endress the discovery of a series

of features that single out a group of early translations, all of them

related in one way or another to al-Kind¯ı, covering many crucial

texts of Greek cosmology, psychology, metaphysics, and theology.45

Later on, the translation of other works and the development of

an autochthonous tradition of philosophical thought would partly

modify the picture of what philosophy is and how it relates to the

Qur’ ¯anic sciences. Still, some general assumptions typical of this

first assimilation of Greek thought into an Islamic milieu would

remain the trademark of *falsafa*, both in East and West: (1) philosophy

is a systematic whole, whose roots lie in logic and whose peak is

rational theology; (2) all the Greek philosophers agree on a limited,

but important, set of doctrines concerning the cosmos, the human

soul, and the first principle; (3) philosophical truths do not derive

from the Qur’ ¯an, even if they fit perfectlywith it. All this results from

the combined reading of Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Plotinus,

and Proclus, whose works are meant to convey a consistent set of

doctrines.

The bio-bibliographical sources mention many Neoplatonic texts

known to readers of Arabic, even though the information at times

is not reliable or incomplete. Still, the picture is impressive: Arabic

speakers acquainted themselves, to different degrees, with the Arabic

or Syriac versions of the works of Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus,

Themistius, Syrianus, Proclus, pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite,

Simplicius, Philoponus, and Olympiodorus. Some of the Arabic

translations of Neoplatonic works have come down to us. Table 2.1

will give some idea of the Neoplatonicwritings available in Arabic.46

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Table 2.1

Authors

Works translated into Syriac and/or

Arabic (transl. extant)

Works mentioned as translated

into Syriac and/or Arabic (transl.

not extant)

Works mentioned in the Arabic

sources, without any mention of a

translation into Syriac and/or Arabic

Plotinus *Enneads* IV–VI, Arabic (Ibn N¯a‘ima

al-H. ims. ¯ı)

Porphyry *Isagoge*, Syriac (within 536); Arabic

Abu¯ ‘Uthma¯n al-Dima¯ shqı¯) *Philos.*

*History* (fragm.), Syriac

*Isagoge*, Syriac transl.; Arabic

transl. (Ayyu¯ b ibn Qa¯ sim

al-Raqq¯ı); comm. on the *Physics*;

*Nic. Eth.*; *Introd. to the*

*Categorical Syllogisms*, Arabic

(Abu¯ ‘Uthma¯n al-Dimashqı¯); *On*

*the Intellect and the Intelligible,*

Syriac; *Istafsa¯ r* (?), Syriac

Comm. on the *Categories*; summary

of the *De Int*. (?); summary of

Aristotle’s philosophy; letter to

Anebo

Iamblichus Commentary on the *Carmen*

*Aureum*, Arabic

Comm. on the *Categories* (?); comm.

on the *De Int.*

Themistius Comm. on *Met*. Lambda, Arabic

(Abu¯ Bishr Matta¯ ibn Yu¯ nus); on the

*De Caelo*, Arabic (Yah. y¯a ibn ‘Ad¯ı);

on the *De Anima*, Arabic

Comm. on the *De Gen. Corr.*; on

the *Nic. Eth.*, Syriac

Comm. on the *Categories*; on the

*Prior* and *Post. Anal.*; on the *Topics*;

comm. on the *Physics*; book to Julian;

letter to Julian

Syrianus Comm. on *Met.* Beta

Proclus *Elements of Theology*; *XVIII*

*Arguments on the Eternity of the*

*Cosmos*; *Arguments for the*

*Immortality of the Soul*, Arabic

Comm. on the *Carmen Aureum*,

Syriac; on a section of Plato’s

*Gorgias*, Syriac; on a section of

treatise *On Fate*, Syriac; on the

*Phaedo* (Abu¯ ‘Alı¯ ibn Zu‘ra¯ )

*Definition of the Origin of Natural*

*Phenomena*; *Ten Doubts about*

*Providence*; *The Indivisible Atom*

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ps.-Dionysius *De Div. Nom., Cael. Hier., Myst.*

*Theol., Eccl. Hier., Ep.*, Syriac

Ammonius Comm. on the *Categories*; on the

*Topics*, I–IV; exposition of Aristotle’s

doctrines about the Creator; aims of

Aristotle in his books; Aristotle’s

proof of Oneness

Simplicius Comm. on the *De Anima*, Syriac

and Arabic

Comm. on the *Categories*

Philoponus Comm. on the *Physics* (fragm.);

*De Aet. Mundi contra Proclum*

(fragm.); *Against Aristotle on the*

*Eternity of the World* (fragm.),

Arabic

Comm. on the *Physics*, Arabic

(Basil and Ibn N¯a‘ima al-H. ims. ¯ı);

*Refutation of Proclus’ Arguments*

*for the Eternity of the World; On*

*the Fact that the Power of*

*Physical Realities is Finite*

Comm. on Aristotle’s Ten Items;

refutation of Nestorius; other

refutations; exposition of Galen’s

medical works

Olympiodorus Comm. on the *Sophist* (Ish. ¯aq ibn

H.

unayn); exposition of the

*Meteorologica* (Abu¯ Bishr Matta¯

ibn Yu¯ nus and al-T. abarı¯); comm.

on the *De Anima*

Ambiguous entry on the *De Gen.*

*Corr.*

David/Elias *Prolegomena*, Arabic

Stephanus Comm. on the *Categories*; comm. on

the *De Int*.

Anonymous Paraphrasis of Aristotle’s

*De Anima*, Arabic

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arabic neoplatonism: a key to

understanding falsafa

Around the forties of the ninth century, when al-Kind¯ı was the tutor

of Ah. mad, the son of the ruling caliph al-Mu‘tas.im(reigned 833–42),

Plotinus’ *Enneads* IV–VI were translated into Arabic by a Christian

from Emessa, IbnN¯a‘ima al-H. ims. ¯ı. We get this information from the

*incipit* of the Prologue to the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, actually

a rearranged Arabic version and paraphrase of part of the *Enneads*.

From this Prologue we learn also that the Arabic version was “corrected”

by al-Kind¯ı himself for the prince. The question thus arises

why al-Kind¯ı would expose him – and obviously an entire milieu

interested in philosophy – to such a teaching. The Prologue provides

the answer: the treatise drawn from the *Enneads* is presented as the

theological complement of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.

Since it is established, by the agreement of the leading philosophers, that the

pre-existing initial causes of the universe are four, namely, Matter, Form, the

Active Cause, and Perfection, it is necessary to examine them . . . Now we

have previously completed an explanation of them and an account of their

causes in our book which is after the *Physics* . . . Let us not waste words over

this branch of knowledge, since we have already given an account of it in

the book of the *Metaphysics*, and let us confine ourselves to what we have

presented there, and at once mention our aim in what we wish to expound

in the present work . . . Now our aim in this book is the discourse on the

Divine Sovereignty, and the explanation of it, and how it is the first cause,

eternity and time being beneath it, and that it is the cause and originator

of causes, in a certain way, and how the luminous force steals from it over

mind and, through the medium of mind, over the universal celestial soul,

and from mind, through the medium of soul, over nature, and from soul,

through the medium of nature, over the things that come to be and pass

away.47

What we are told here is that another account will follow the *Metaphysics*

and deal with the transmission of God’s causality to the

things falling under generation and corruption, through the mediation

of two suprasensible principles – Intellect and the World Soul –

and nature. After having recalled the subject matter of Aristotle’s

*Metaphysics*, the author of the Prologue (in all likelihood, al-Kind¯ı

himself)48 presents the readerwith another discipline, rational theology,

which is intrinsically connected to metaphysics and yet distinct

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from it, and which deals with the One, Intellect, and World Soul.

Obviously, there is no trace of these principles in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*,

and it has been argued that for al-Kind¯ı’s circle Plotinus’

*Enneads* represented the needed complement to the account of the

prime mover given in *Metaphysics* Lambda.49 However, the reader

of the *Theology of Aristotle* may be disappointed to see that the

project outlined in the Prologue is not carried on in the *Theology*

itself, and that parts of the *Enneads* and extensive interpolations

are combined in what appears to be a baffling disorder. Only upon

closer examination does the structure of the *Theology* appear: created

out of Porphyry’s edition,50 skipping the “propaedeutic” of *Enneads*

I–III and translating only treatises belonging to *Enneads* IV–VI (on

Soul, Intellect, and the One), the *Theology* is likely to be an abortive

attempt at producing a systematic work on rational theology, whose

subject matters are announced in the Prologue according to their

ontological dignity – the First Cause, Intellect, the World Soul – but

whose order of exposition is constrained by the actual order of the

*Enneads*.

The ideal order outlined in the Prologue presents the reader

with an exposition of the way in which the prime mover acts: its

sovereignty is real, its causality reaches all creatures through Intellect

and the World Soul. The *Theology*, on the other hand, presents

the reader first with the Plotinian topic of the descent of soul into

the body and with the idea of soul as the mediator between the visible

and invisible realms. Then, a description of the intelligible world

and of Intellect as the first creature, and an account of the action of

the True One follow, in a rough, hesitant order. Plotinus’ description

of *nous* as the first image of the One is reshaped into the idea

of “creation through the intermediary of intellect.” Plotinus’ *nous*

also provides the author of the *Theology* with a model for God’s creation

and providence. The True One is creditedwith a mode of action

designed to explain how an immutable principle can cause anything

to exist: the Neoplatonic analysis of how Forms act is expounded

as a description of God’s causality and providence “through its very

being (*bi-anniyyatihi faqat.*

),”51 which involves no change at all.

Philosophical topics that did not exist as such before Plotinus and

were created out of his rethinking of Platonism – the amphibious

life of soul, which eternally belongs to both worlds, seeing the intelligibles

and animating the living body; the identity of the Forms

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and Intellect; the absolute simplicity and ineffability of the First

Principle – reappear in the formative period of *falsafa*. They equal,

in the eyes of many Islamic philosophers, the doctrine of the Greeks

dealing with divinity, crowning the study of “what is after the

physics.” And it is Aristotle, the First Teacher, who is credited with

such a rational theology. This is so not only in the *Theology of*

*Aristotle*, but also in the rearrangement of the Arabic translation of

Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, the *Book of Aristotle’s Exposition of*

*the Pure Good* (*Kit ¯ ab al-¯ıd. ¯ ah.*

*li-Arist.*

*¯ ut. ¯ alis f¯ı al-khayr al-mah.*

*d.*

),52

whose origin within the circle of al-Kind¯ı has been demonstrated

by Gerhard Endress. This rearrangement, which has also been credited

to al-Kind¯ı himself,53 will become in twelfth-century Toledo,

thanks to Gerard of Cremona’s translation into Latin, the *Liber Aristotelis*

*de Expositione Bonitatis Purae* (*Liber de Causis*). The Latin

Aristotelian corpus too will then culminate in Neoplatonic rational

theology.

The project of crowning Aristotle’s metaphysics with a rational

theology based on the Platonic tradition is an application of the late

Neoplatonic model of philosophy as a systematic discipline, covering

topics from logic to theology. We do not know whether this pattern

reached the circle of al-Kind¯ı as such or whether it was in a sense

recreated. What we can say is that the attribution of a Neoplatonic

rational theology toAristotle has its origins in post-Plotinian Platonism,

and in the primacy that the Alexandrian commentators gave to

Aristotle without renouncing the main Neoplatonic tenets regarding

the One, Intellect, and Soul. For this reason, *falsafa* cannot be

properly understood if its roots in the philosophical thought of Late

Antiquity are not taken into account.54

notes

This chapter is dedicated to Richard M. Frank, in gratitude.

1 P. Hadot, “Lam’etaphysique de Porphyre,” in *Porphyre*, Entretiens Hardt

XII (Vandoeuvres: 1965), 127–57.

2 H. D. Saffrey, “Pourquoi Porphyre a-t-il ’edit ’e Plotin? R’eponse provisoire,”

in Porphyre, *La vie de Plotin*, vol. II, ed. L. Brisson et al. (Paris:

1992), 31–57.

3 Porphyry commented upon the *Categories* (*Commentaria in Aristotelem*

*Graeca* [hereafter *CAG*] IV 1), *On Interpretation*, the

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*Sophistical Refutations*, the *Physics*, and the*Nicomachean Ethics*. The

fragments are edited in *Porphyrii Philosophi Fragmenta*, ed. A. Smith

(Stuttgart: 1993).

4 Porphyre, *Isagoge*, ed. A. de Libera and A.-Ph. Segonds (Paris: 1998).

5 C. Evangeliou, *Aristotle’s Categories and Porphyry* (Leiden: 1988);

H. D. Saffrey, “Pourquoi Porphyre a-t-il ’edit ’e Plotin?”

6 In his autobiography, Avicenna says that his teacher al-N¯atil¯ı taught

him logic, starting with the *Isagoge* (see D. Gutas, *Avicenna and the*

*AristotelianTradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna’s Philosophical*

*Works* [Leiden: 1988], 25).

7 L. G. Westerink, J. Trouillard, and A.-Ph. Segonds (eds.), *Prol´egom`enes*

*a` la philosophie de Platon* (Paris: 1990), 39.16–26.

8 Marinus, *Proclus ou sur le bonheur*, ed. H. D. Saffrey, A.-Ph. Segonds,

and C. Luna (Paris: 2001), sect. 13. Syrianus was also the first Platonist

to comment at length upon Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (*CAG* VI 1).

In his commentary, he systematically had recourse to Alexander of

Aphrodisias’ exegesis: see C. Luna, *Trois ´etudes sur la tradition des*

*commentaires anciens a` la “Me´ taphysique” d’Aristote* (Leiden: 2001).

See also my “Commenting on Aristotle: From Late Antiquity to Arab

Aristotelianism,” inW. Geerlings and C. Schulze (eds.), *Der Kommentar*

*in Antike und Mittelalter: Beitra¨ ge zu seiner Erforschung* (Leiden:

2002), 201–51.

9 Proclus’ commentaries on the *First Alcibiades* (ed. Segonds, 1985),

*Cratylus* (ed. Pasquali, 1908), *Republic* (ed. Kroll, 1899), *Timaeus* (ed.

Diehl, 1903–6), and *Parmenides* (ed. Cousin, 1864) have come down

to us.

10 H. D. Saffrey, “Accorder entre elles les traditions th’eologiques: une

caract’eristique du n’eoplatonisme ath’enien,” in E. P. Bos and P. A.

Meijer (eds.), *On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy*

(Leiden: 1992), 35–50.

11 H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink, *Proclus: Th´eologie platonicienne*,

vols. I–VI (Paris: 1968–97).

12 Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, ed. E. R. Dodds (Oxford: 1963).

13 Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, proposition 132, 118.2–4.

14 This is the case with Ammonius, the teacher of the school of Alexandria,

whose father Hermias was a fellow disciple of Proclus at Syrianus’

classes, and who studied in Athens before getting the chair in Alexandria.

In turn, Damascius was educated in Alexandria by Ammonius,

but succeeded Proclus as the head of the Platonic school in Athens.

15 Against K. Praechter, who in 1910 argued for a doctrinal difference

between the Neoplatonic circles of Athens and Alexandria, I. Hadot,

*Le probl`eme du n´eoplatonisme alexandrin: Hi ´ erocl `es et Simplicius*

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(Paris: 1978), called attention to the fact that the two circles focused

on different steps of the curriculum. The lack of theological speculation

in the works of the Alexandrian Neoplatonists does not imply

that they held different metaphysical doctrines; they simply addressed

preliminary topics without direct theological import.

16 See the entry “Ammonius” by H. D. Saffrey and J.-P. Mah’e in Goulet

[20], vol. I, 168–70.

17 See P. Hoffmann, “Damascius,” in Goulet [20], vol. II, 541–93.

18 Simplicius, *Commentaire sur le “Manuel” d’Epict `ete*, ed. I. Hadot, vol.

I (Paris: 2001). Now translated in Simplicius, *On Epictetus’Handbook*,

trans. T. Brennan and C. Brittain, 2 vols. (London: 2003).

19 *Categories*: *CAG* VIII 1; *Physics*: *CAG* IX and X; *De Caelo*: *CAG* VII.

20 See Hoffmann, “Damascius.”

21 H. D. Saffrey, “Le chr’etien Jean Philopon et la survivance de l’ ’ecole

d’Alexandrie au VIe si ` ecle,” *Revue des ´etudes grecques* 67 (1954),

396–410.

22 Against eternalism John Philoponus wrote *De Aeternitate Mundi contra*

*Proclum* (ed. Rabe, 1899) and a treatise against Aristotle, lost but

quoted by both Simplicius and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı. See Philoponus, *Against Aristotle*

*on the Eternity of the World*, trans. C. Wildberg (London: 1987).

23 R. Sorabji (ed.), *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*

(London: 1987); K. Verrycken, “The Development of Philoponus’

Thought and its Chronology,” inR. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed:*

*The Ancient Commentators and their Influence* (London: 1990), 233–

74, and “Philoponus’ Interpretation of Plato’s Cosmogony,” *Documenti*

*e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 8 (1997), 269–318;

U. M. Lang, *John Philoponus and the Controversies over Chalcedon*

*in the Sixth Century* (Leuven: 2001).

24 Agathias, *Hist.* II.31.2–4 (81.8–21 ed. Keydell); see also Hoffmann,

“Damascius,” 556–9; M. Tardieu, “Chosro` es,” in Goulet [20], vol. II,

309–18.

25 J. Teixidor, “Les textes syriaques de la logique de Paul le Perse,” *Semitica*

47 (1997), 117–38; “La d’edicace de Paul le Perse `a Chosro` es,” in J. D.

Dubois and B. Roussel (eds.), *Entrer en mati `ere: les Prologues* (Paris:

1997), 199–208.

26 Gutas [58].

27 For instance, Bardaisan (154–222) wrote in Syriac. Cf. J. Teixidor,

“Bardesane de Syrie,” in Goulet [20], vol. II, 54–63.

28 J. Teixidor, “Introduzione,” in *Storia della scienza*, IV, I, *La scienza*

*siriaca* (Rome: 2001), 7.

29 K. Georr, *Les Cat ´egories d’Aristote dans leurs versions syro-arabes*

(Beirut: 1948); Endress [54], 407–12; H. Hugonnard-Roche, “L’interm

’ediaire syriaque dans la transmission de la philosophie grecque `a

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l’arabe: le cas de l’*Organon* d’Aristote,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*

1 (1991), 187–209.

30 S. Brock, “From Antagonismto Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek

Learning,” in N. G. Garso‥ıan, T. F. Mathews, and R. W. Thomson

(eds.), *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*

(Washington, D.C.: 1982), 17–39; “The Syriac Commentary Tradition,”

in Burnett [50], 3–18.

31 H. Hugonnard-Roche, “Les *Cat ´egories* d’Aristote comme introduction

`a la philosophie dans un commentaire syriaque de Sergius de Resh‘ayn¯a

(*†*536),” *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 8

(1997), 339–63; “Note sur Sergius de Resh‘ayn¯ a, traducteur du grec en

syriaque et commentateur d’Aristote,” in Endress and Kruk [55], 121–

43.

32 H.Hugonnard-Roche, “La tradizione della logica aristotelica,” in *Storia*

*della scienza*, IV, I, 18.

33 See Gutas [76].

34 A. Elamrani-Jamal and H. Hugonnard-Roche, “Aristote: l’*Organon*.

Tradition syriaque et arabe,” in Goulet [20], vol. I, 502–28; H.

Hugonnard-Roche, “Les traductions syriaques de l’*Isagoge* de Porphyre

et la constitution du corpus syriaque de logique,” *Revue d’histoire des*

*textes* 24 (1994), 293–312.

35 D. Miller, “George, Bishop of the Arab Tribes, *On True Philosophy*,”

*Aram* 5 (1993), 303–20.

36 See Gutas [58], 61–9.

37 H. Hugonnard-Roche, “Remarques sur la tradition arabe de l’*Organon*

d’apr`es le manuscrit Paris, Biblioth`eque Nationale, ar. 2346,” in Burnett

[50], 19–28.

38 Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s testimony comes from the lost work *The Blossoms of Philosophy*.

See Endress [54], 411 and Gutas [58].

39 M. Meyerhof, “Von Alexandrien nach Bagdad: Ein Beitrag zur

Geschichte des philosophischen und medizinischen Unterrichts bei

den Arabern,” *Sitzungsberichte der Berliner Akademie der Wissenschaften,*

*Philologisch-historische Klasse* (1930), 389–429.

40 See Gutas [58].

41 C. Hein, *Definition und Einteilung der Philosophie: von der*

*spa¨ tantiken Einleitungsliteratur zur arabischen Enzyklopa¨die* (Frankfurt

a. M.: 1987).

42 In the account mentioned above, n. 38, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı reports that the two

pupils of the last teacher of philosophy in Antioch were from Marw

and from H.

arr ¯an, and that when they left Antioch, they took the

books with them. It has been claimed thatH.

arr ¯an was the place where

Simplicius settled after having left Ctesiphon and where he wrote his

commentaries on Aristotle (M. Tardieu, “Les calendriers en usage `a

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H.

arr ¯an, d’apr`es les sources arabes, et le commentaire de Simplicius

`a la *Physique* d’Aristote,” in I. Hadot [ed.] *Simplicius: sa vie, son*

*oeuvre, sa survie* [Berlin: 1987], 40–57), but this claim has been convincingly

criticized by J. Lameer, “From Alexandria toBaghdad: Reflections

on the Genesis of a Problematical Tradition,” in Endress and Kruk

[55], 181–91, and by C. Luna, review of R. Thiel, *Simplikios und das*

*Ende der neuplatonischen Schule in Athen*, in *Mnemosyne* 54 (2001),

482–504.

43 See Gutas [58].

44 See Endress [54], continuation in W. Fischer (ed.), *Grundriss der arabischen*

*Philologie*, vol. III (Wiesbaden: 1992), 3–152.

45 See Endress [53]; Endress [67].

46 Due to space limitations, I cannot give the exact reference for

each item in *Kita¯b al-Fihrist* by Ibn al-Nadı¯m, which is the main

source of this table. Some items are not recorded in it: Plotinus’

*Enneads* IV–VI (ed. Dieterici, 1882, and Badaw¯ı, 1966); Iamblichus’

commentary on the *Carmen Aureum* (ed. H. Daiber, *Neuplatonische*

*Pythagorica in arabischem Gewande: der Kommentar des*

*Iamblichus zu den “Carmina Aurea”* [Amsterdam: 1995]); pseudo-

Dionysius the Areopagite (see S. Lilla in Goulet [20], vol. II, 727–

42, at 729); the *Prolegomena* by David-Elias (see Hein, *Definition*

*und Einteilung der Philosophie*); the anonymous *In De Anima*

(see R. Arnzen, *Aristoteles’ De Anima: eine verlorene spa¨ tantike*

*Paraphrase in arabischer und persischer U¨ berlieferung* [Leiden:

1998]).

47 English translation by G. Lewis, in *Plotini Opera*, ed. P. Henry and

H.-R. Schwyzer, vol. II (Paris: 1959), 486–7.

48 See my “*Pseudo-Theology of Aristotle*, Chapter I: Structure and

Composition,” *Oriens* 36 (2001), 78–112.

49 F. W. Zimmermann, “The Origins of the So-called *Theology of Aristotle,*”

in Kraye, Ryan, and Schmitt [60], 110–240.

50 H.-R. Schwyzer, “Die pseudoaristotelische *Theologie* und die Plotin-

Ausgabe des Porphyrios,” *Museum Helveticum* 90 (1941), 216–36.

51 I have argued in favor of the influence of pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

on this formula in “L’influence du vocabulaire arabe: *causa*

*prima est esse tantum*,” in J. Hamesse and C. Steel (eds.), *L’ ´ elaboration*

*du vocabulaire philosophique au Moyen Age* (Turnhout: 2001),

51–97.

52 Ed. Bardenhewer, 1882 and Badaw¯ı, 1955. English translation in

Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. V. A.

Guagliardo, C. R. Hess, and R. C. Taylor (Washington, D.C.: 1996).

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53 See my “Al-Kind¯ı et l’auteur du *Liber de Causis*,” in D’Ancona [51],

155–94, and my “*Pseudo-Theology of Aristotle*, Chapter I.”

54 My warmest thanks are due to Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor

for correcting the English of this paper. Steven Harvey read a first draft

of it and made many useful remarks; my warmest thanks are due to

him too. I am solely responsible for any weaknesses.

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3 Al-Kind¯ı and the reception

of Greek philosophy

The previous chapter has given some sense of the enormous impact of

the translation movement during the ‘Abb¯asid caliphate, which rendered

Greek works of science and literature into Arabic.1 The translation

of what we would now consider to be properly philosophical

works was only a small part of this movement. Translation of philosophy

went hand in hand with the translation of more “scientific”

texts, such as the medical writings of Galen and the astronomical

and mathematical works of Euclid, Ptolemy, and others. Under the

‘Abb¯asids the most important group of translators, in terms of sheer

output and the quality of their translations, was that of the ChristianH.

unayn ibn Ish. ¯aq (808–873 C.E.), and his son Ish. ¯aq ibnH.

unayn

(died 910 C.E.).H.

unayn and his school produced many translations,

including of works by Plato and Aristotle (especially the logical corpus);

particularly important to H.

unayn himself were translations

of Galen, which formed the basis for H.unayn’s own treatises on

medicine.2

A second, slightly earlier group was that gathered around the person

of Abu¯ Yu¯ suf Ya‘qu¯ b ibn Ish. a¯q al-Kindı¯ (died about 870 C.E.). Al-

Kind¯ı’s circle did not produce as many translations as the H.

unayn

circle, yet some of the works they did translate were of immense

importance in determining the Arabic reception of Greek philosophical

thought. It is quite likely that the choice of which texts to translate

was guided in part by the philosophical concerns of al-Kind¯ı

and his collaborators. The translations took various forms. Some

stay close to the text yet are awkward compared to H.

unayn’s productions,

which were marked by superior method (e.g., the collation

of numerous manuscripts) and a more advanced and consistent

technical terminology.3 An example is the translation of Aristotle’s

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*Metaphysics* written in al-Kind¯ı’s circle.4 Other translations were

relatively loose paraphrases of their source texts. Here considerable

liberties were taken with the Greek sources, whose Arabic versions

might be differently arranged and even include original elaborations

written by members of the translation circle. Examples include a

paraphrase of Aristotle’s *De Anima*,5 the famous *Theology of Aristotle*,

and the *Book on the Pure Good* (known in Latin as the *Liber*

*de Causis*).

The approach used in these interpretive paraphrases gives us an

initial indication of the aims of the translation movement as far as

al-Kind¯ı was concerned. Al-Kind¯ı himself did not make translations,

and it is quite possible that he could not even read Greek. Rather, he

oversaw the work of the translators, and drew on the results in his

own writings.6 Al-Kind¯ı described his own project as the attempt to

“supply completely what the ancients said . . . and to complete what

they did not say comprehensively, in accordance with the custom of

language and the practices of the time” (103.9–11). This required the

production of a new philosophical vocabulary in Arabic, a process

that began in al-Kind¯ı circle translations and that al-Kind¯ı furthered

in his original compositions. For example, a treatise *On the Definitions*

*and Descriptions of Things*, which is most likely by al-Kind¯ı,

provides an overview of the new Arabic philosophical terminology,

with definitions based on Greek sources. As we will see, al-Kind¯ı’s

advertisement of Greek thought also meant showing the relevance

of philosophical ideas for solving contemporary problems, including

problems emerging from Islamic theology (*kala¯m*).

The works inwhich al-Kind¯ı pursued these goals were treatises of

varying length, in the formof epistles addressed to his sponsors (most

frequently the son of the caliph al-Mu‘tas.im). Al-Kind¯ı’s output was

vast. A list of his works shows that he wrote hundreds of treatises

in a startling array of fields, ranging from metaphysics, ethics, and

psychology (i.e., the study of the soul), to medicine, mathematics,

astronomy, and optics, and further afield to more practical topics

like perfumes and swords.7 Most of these treatises are lost, and those

that remain are a reminder of the fragility of the historical record of

this early period of Arabic thought: many of his philosophical works

survive only in a single manuscript.

Because of al-Kind¯ı’s avowed dependence on Greek philosophy,

the specificity of the topics he deals with in his treatises, and the

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occasional inconsistency between his extant writings, it can be difficult

to see a novel and coherent system emerging from the Kindian

corpus. This is hardly surprising, given that al-Kind¯ı was attempting

to integrate numerous disparate strands of Greek philosophy, especially

Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism. The fact that he was even

able to undertake such a task with his relatively limited resources

can only be explained by the fact that, as we will see, the way had

been prepared for him by the late ancients. It was above all their

example that al-Kind¯ı followed in writing his own philosophical

works.

metaphysics as theology

Among these works the most complex and important is *On First*

*Philosophy*, which is a treatise in four parts (it seems originally to

have contained more material, which is now lost), dedicated to the

subject of metaphysics.8 The first part, which includes the statement

of purpose quoted above, is nothing less than a defense of Hellenism.

Al-Kind¯ı argues that Greek thought is to be welcomed, despite its foreign

provenance, because our own inquiry into the truth is greatly

assisted by those who have achieved truth in the past. Al-Kind¯ı also

does not omit to point out the relevance of Greek metaphysics for

his Muslimaudience. The study of metaphysics includes, and is even

primarily, the study of God: “the noblest part of philosophy and the

highest in degree is first philosophy, by which I mean the science

of the First Truth, Who is the cause of all truth” (98.1–2). This distillation

of metaphysics into theology affected the way that generations

of philosophers read Aristotle: later Avicenna said that reading

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı freed him from his misunderstanding of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*,

and it has been plausibly suggested that themisunderstanding

in question was the Kindian interpretation that the work deals

primarily with God.9 Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı, followed by Avicenna, held that first

philosophy is the study of being qua being, and only incidentally of

God. Al-Kind¯ı, by contrast, does not leave room for a sharp distinction

between theology and metaphysics.

Indeed, the surviving part of *On First Philosophy* ends climactically

with a statement of God’s nature. The path al-Kind¯ı takes to

that statement is somewhat surprising, however. Although allusions

to Aristotle proliferate in *On First Philosophy*, the work as a whole

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contains two major elements, neither of which looks especially Aristotelian.

The first of these is in fact a rejection of Aristotle’s thesis

that the world is eternal. Al-Kind¯ı’s arguments here are drawn from

the avowedly anti-Aristotelian polemics of the late Greek Christian

Neoplatonist commentator John Philoponus.10 These arguments

attempt to show that the created world cannot be infinite.Time– and

therefore motion, since time is the measure of motion – must have a

beginning. In this al-Kind¯ı differs from the subsequent Aristotelian

tradition in Arabic. Avicenna and Averroes in particular are well

known for having defended Aristotle’s thesis of the eternal world.

The other major element of *On First Philosophy* is a discussion of

oneness (*wah.*

*da*). Al-Kind¯ı first shows that in the created world, all

things are characterized by both multiplicity and unity. For example,

things that have parts are both many (because the parts are numerous)

and one (because the parts form a whole). None of these things are a

“true unity,” by which al-Kind¯ı means something that is one in every

respect, and not multiple in any way. Rather, the created things have

a source of unity, something that is “essentially one,” which again

means utterly one, and not at all multiple.11 Al-Kind¯ı elaborates by

drawing on Aristotle’s *Categories* (and also on an introduction to

that work, the *Isagoge*, written by the Neoplatonist Porphyry) to

provide us with a comprehensive list of the sorts of thing that can be

said (*maqu¯ la¯ t*). These include accidents, species, genera, and various

others. Now, whatever is said of something, argues al-Kind¯ı, must

involve multiplicity. Sometimes this is obvious, as in the examples

“this elephant weighs two tons” and “this elephant is twenty years

old,” where we have as predicates weight and time, both of which are

divisible by measurement (in this case into two and twenty, respectively).

But it is also the case for statements like “this is a body”

and “this animal belongs to the species *elephant*.” Here we have

two further kinds of multiplicity: first “body,” which is divided into

many, because bodies have many parts, and then “elephant,” which

is divided into many, because there are many elephants. No concept

or predicate that can be ascribed to something is compatible with

absolute oneness.

Because God, the source of all unity, is the true One in question,

the argument entails a very rigorous negative theology. Anything

that can be said of something else will be inapplicable to the absolutely

one. As al-Kind¯ı says, “the true One possesses no matter or

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form, quantity or quality, or relation, and is not described by any

of the other categories; nor does He possess genus, difference, individual,

property, common accident, or motion . . . He is therefore

nothing but pure oneness (*wah.*

*da faqat.*

*mah.*

*d*)” (160.13–16). This

seems to be something of a counsel of despair for would-be theologians:

the conclusion is apparently that nothing at all can be known

or said about God. Yet there is a more positive basis for theology

lurking here, because after all al-Kind¯ı is willing to say at least two

things about God: that he is “one,” and that he is the source of the

oneness in created things. (As we will see shortly, this is pivotal in

al-Kind¯ı’s understanding of God as a Creator. He believes that for

God to bestow oneness on something is to make that thing exist, in

other words, to create it.) We might, then, extrapolate to a general

method for talking about God. Whatever characteristic God has, he

has it absolutely, and in no way possesses its opposite; he is also the

source of that characteristic for other things. In this case, because

God is one, he cannot be multiple in any way and is the cause of all

oneness.

In another work, *On the True, First, Complete Agent and the*

*Deficient Agent that is [only an Agent] Metaphorically*, al-Kind¯ı

uses the same method to affirm that God is an “agent” (*fa¯ ‘il*, which

also means “efficient cause”). In fact he is strictly speaking the *only*

agent, because he alone acts without being acted upon. In other

words, he is fully and absolutely active, and in no way passive,

just as he is absolutely one and in no way multiple. Created things,

meanwhile, are only “metaphorically” agents, because they can only

transmit God’s agency in a chain of causes (similarly, in *On First Philosophy*

al-Kind¯ı says that created things are only “metaphorically”

one, because they are also many). The idea here seems to be that

God acts through intermediary causes: God acts on something, then

that “acts” on something else, and so on. But these secondary causes

really do not “act” at all, they only serve to convey God’s action to

the next link in the chain.

We seem to be quite distant here from the author who was the

most important influence on al-Kind¯ı, namely Aristotle. If anything,

al-Kind¯ı’s characterization of God seems more reminiscent

of the Platonic theory of Forms. Plato had stressed that, unlike physical

things, the Forms excluded their opposites: a heavy elephant is

light compared to a mountain, but the Form of Heavy is in no way

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light. Similarly God, the true One and agent, is in no way multiple

or passive. Yet al-Kind¯ı did not know Plato well and what he did

know likely came to him only indirectly. By contrast, al-Kind¯ı knew

Aristotle quite well and uses Aristotelian concepts and terminology

constantly, both in *On First Philosophy* and elsewhere. But often he

deploys these concepts to defend views and devise arguments that

are not to be found inAristotle. Thus if we go straight from Plato and

Aristotle to al-Kind¯ı, it will seem that there is very little continuity

between Greek and early Arabic philosophy.

Yet this is an entirely misleading impression, and one dispelled

by noting that Aristotle came down to al-Kind¯ı filtered through the

works of the late ancients.We have already mentioned a few of these

figures, and their impact on Arabic philosophy has been discussed

in the previous chapter. But the importance of late ancient thought

for al-Kind¯ı is so great that it will be worth reviewing here some

of the authors who bridge the gap between Aristotle and al-Kind¯ı.

First, there are the schools of Hellenistic philosophy: the Stoics,

Skeptics, and Epicureans. The latter two schools seem to have left

no trace in al-Kind¯ı’s philosophy and the Stoics only faint traces

in al-Kind¯ı’s ethics: in his work of consolation, *On the Art of Dispelling*

*Sorrows*, al-Kind¯ı uses an allegory from Epictetus’*Handbook*,

comparing our earthly life to a sojourn on land that interrupts a sea

voyage.12

The major influence is rather the Greek Neoplatonic tradition,

which runs roughly from the career of Plotinus (205–70 C.E.) until

529 C.E., when the Platonic school was closed in Athens. Al-Kind¯ı

knew versions of the *Enneads* of Plotinus and *Elements of Theology*

of Proclus, which were rendered into Arabic as the above-mentioned

*Theology of Aristotle* and *Book on the Pure Good*, respectively. Both

of these were later thought to have been written by Aristotle, but al-

Kind¯ı was probably aware that they were not genuinely Aristotle’s.

Still he saw Aristotle and Neoplatonism as compatible, and this for

two reasons. Firstly, since al-Kind¯ı was in the business of advertising

the power and truth of Greek philosophy, he was predisposed to

see all of ancient thought as a single, coherent system. Convinced

of the truth of Aristotle’s philosophy and the truth of Neoplatonism,

he could hardly admit that the two were incompatible with

one another.13 Secondly, he was exposed to Aristotle together with

some of the vast corpus of commentaries written on him, by the

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Aristotelian Alexander of Aphrodisias but also by Neoplatonists such

as Porphyry and John Philoponus.14

Al-Kind¯ı’s apparently unorthodox interpretation of Aristotle is

thus in fact a sign of the continuity of Greek and Arabic thought,

since it is based on Neoplatonic interpretations of and reactions to

Aristotle.We have already seen several examples of this. Perhaps the

most important is a point that is easily taken for granted: al-Kind¯ı

believes that God is an *efficient* cause, not just a final cause, and he

seems to think that Aristotle would agree. (An efficient cause acts

to produce its effect, whereas a final cause exercises causality only

by being the object of striving or desire.) In this al-Kind¯ı is, perhaps

unwittingly, adopting the interpretation of the Neoplatonist Ammonius,

who wrote an entire work urging that Aristotle’s God is an efficient

as well as final cause.15 This is a crucial contribution to the

history of Arabic philosophy on al-Kind¯ı’s part, because it makes it

possible to see the God of Aristotle (a pure, immaterial intellect, and

an unmoved cause of motion) as compatiblewith two other rival theologies.

First, we have the Neoplatonic theory, according to which

the One or God “emanates” the world from himself, in an outpouring

or overflowing of generosity and power that is mediated by Intellect.

Second, there is God as the Creator of Islam and the other revealed

religions. However we interpret this notion of God as “creating,” it

would seem to involve efficient and not merely final causality.

In fact al-Kind¯ı affirms all three of these portrayals of God,

Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, and creationist. He says that God is an

unmoved mover, but also that God gives from himself to his creation.

Here he uses the term *fayd.* , “emanation,” and as we saw in *On the*

*True Agent* he affirms the Neoplatonic idea that God acts on the

world through intermediary causes. God’s act is creation, which he

defines as “bringing being to be from non-being” (118.18), and God is

the principle of being, “the true being” (*al-anniyya al-h. aqqa*) (215.4),

just as he is the principle of agency and of oneness. In fact these various

characterizations of God seem to be closely related, if not equivalent.

When God creates, he emanates oneness or being onto a thing,

where these two are synonymous at least in God (“his oneness is

nothing other than his being,” 161.14, cf. 160.4–5). He puts the point

in a more Aristotelian way when he says that God creates something

by “bringing it forth (*kharaja*) into actuality” (257.10, 375.13).

The view is presented with a good deal of technical terminology, but

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it has an intuitive plausibility. When God creates an elephant, for

example, he makes the elephant *be*, which is to make it be *one* in

a certain way, namely “one elephant,” not an elephant that merely

could exist but an elephant that *actually* does exist.

This interpretation of divine creation, at once Aristotelian, Neoplatonic,

and Islamic, would echo through the rest of the Arabic

tradition. Aspects of it are anticipated by late ancient authors. The

notion of God as a First Principle that is paradigmatically one and

the source of oneness for all other things, is found in both Plotinus

and Proclus, on whom al-Kind¯ı drew in *On First Philosophy*. This

idea of God as the principle of being is found, not in Plotinus, but in

the Arabic version of his works, the *Theology of Aristotle*, as well

as in the *Book on the Pure Good*.16 And John Philoponus’ polemics

against Aristotle provided a source for the definition of creation as

the manifestation of being from non-being.

In his most extensive discussion of creation, which appears incongruously

enough in a survey of Aristotle’s corpus (*On the Quantity*

*of Aristotle’s Books*), al-Kind¯ı again draws on Philoponus’ *Against*

*Aristotle on the Eternity of the World*.17 In the course of his attack

on Aristotle, Philoponus had spoken of creation as God’s bringing

something to be from non-being (*mˆe on*), and al-Kind¯ı repeats the

point. Al-Kind¯ı’s argument for this conception of creation in *On the*

*Quantity of Aristotle’s Books* follows Philoponus’ strategy of using

Aristotle against himself. A basic Aristotelian principle is that all

change involves contraries. For something to become hot, it must

first have been cold. Al-Kind¯ı applies this principle to God’s act of

creation, reasoning that it too must involve a passage from one contrary

to another. In this case, what God creates receives being, as we

have seen. It must then be that what is created was previously in

a state of “not-being.” This gives al-Kind¯ı a further reason to hold,

with Philoponus, that there must be a first moment of creation. If

there were not, and the world were eternal, then the world would

always have being, and there would be no need for God to “create”

the world at all – that is, to bring it from not-being to being.

psychology

Nor was this the only set of issues on which Philoponus influenced

al-Kind¯ı. Among al-Kind¯ı’s most historically significant works is the

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brief*Onthe Intellect*.18 Again, the treatise is incomprehensiblewithout

reference to late ancient authors. It reflects their understanding

of Aristotle’s theory of intellect, as presented in the third book of

his *De Anima* (*On the Soul*). To take account of the various things

that Aristotle says there about intellect, late ancient authors such as

Alexander, Themistius, and Philoponus had distinguished between

several stages or kinds of intellect. It seems that this taxonomy of

intellects reached al-Kind¯ı from Philoponus, though al-Kind¯ı does

not agree with Philoponus’ account in all its details.

Al-Kind¯ı presents the theory that there is a separate, immaterial

“first” intellect, which is not identified with God as was sometimes

done by the late ancients. Individual human intellects are distinct

from this first intellect. They start out “in potency,” that is, with

an ability to grasp universal concepts. But this ability is realized

only when the first intellect, which is always thinking about all the

universals, “makes our potential intellect become actual,” in other

words makes the human intellect actually think about a given universal

concept. Why can’t human intellects reach these concepts on

their own, without the help of the first intellect? Al-Kind¯ı’s answer

is that just as, for example, wood is potentially hot and needs something

actually hot such as fire to actualize that potential hotness,

so the intellect that is only potentially thinking about something

needs a cause to make it actually think. That cause must actually be

thinking about the same concept, just as fire must actually be hot

to cause heat. The cause of the actualization in the case of thinking

is the first intellect. Once this has happened the concept is stored in

one’s mental library, which al-Kind¯ı calls the “acquired intellect” –

and from then on one can think about it whenever one wishes.

This short treatise has perhaps more significance as a precursor

of the more famous treatments of intellect found in al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı,

Avicenna, and Averroes, than it does in helping us understand al-

Kind¯ı’s other works. Al-Kind¯ı does not often invoke the technical

distinction between kinds of intellect inhis other works. Yet another

distinction made in *On the Intellect* is of fundamental importance

for al-Kind¯ı’s general theory of human knowledge. As is clear from

the foregoing, al-Kind¯ı does not think that humans can obtain general

or universal concepts directly from sense perception. That is,

I cannot acquire the universal concept of elephant just by looking

at a single elephant, or even a herd of elephants. When I look at an

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elephant, al-Kind¯ı thinks that I only receive a “sensible form,” in

other words the visual representation of the elephant. This is to be

distinguished from the purely immaterial concept that is the species

of elephant, which al-Kind¯ı also calls a “form,” but a universal form.

The distinction between sensible and universal form appears in *On*

*First Philosophy* as well as in *On the Intellect*, and it again allows

al-Kind¯ı to have his cake and eat it too in his response to the Greek

philosophical tradition. He can remain faithful to Aristotle’s empiricist

epistemology by saying that we do learn about the world by

receiving (sensible) forms through the bodily organs. But at the same

time he accepts a more Neoplatonic epistemology. According to this

epistemology there is a separate intellect that is always thinking

about all universal forms, and humans come to grasp these latter

forms by virtue of a relationship with that separate intellect.

This theory of knowledge is crucial for al-Kind¯ı’s treatment of

soul. His psychology is set out in several works, but especially the

*Discourse on the Soul*, which, in a pattern now becoming familiar to

us, promises a treatment of the soul based on Aristotle, but moves

on to a distinctly un-Aristotelian treatment of the topic at hand.

The soul, says al-Kind¯ı, is a “simple substance” (273.4), immaterial

and related to the material world only by having faculties that

are exercised through the body.19 Echoing Plato’s *Phaedo*, but also

with allusions to Pythagoreanism and the *Theology of Aristotle*,20 al-

Kind¯ı stresses that these faculties (the irascible and desiring faculties)

are apt to lead the soul astray and plunge it further into association

with the body. The soul’s good is to concentrate on its “intellectual”

aspect. If it does this it may, especially after death, come to be in a

purely “intelligible world,” and “in the light of the Creator” (275.12–

13). I can be assured that my soul will in fact survive to take part in

such an afterlife because its distinction from my body shows that

the death of my body will not mean the death of my soul. Rather, as

an immaterial and simple substance, my soul is immortal.

Thus, just as al-Kind¯ı’s epistemology rests on the distinction of

sensible from intellectual forms, so his eschatology exhorts us to

reject the sensible and pursue the intelligible.Hismajor ethical work,

*On the Art of Dispelling Sorrows*,21 emphasizes this dichotomy:

It is impossible for someone to attain everything he seeks, or to keep all

of the things he loves safe from loss, because stability and permanence are

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nonexistent in the world of generation and corruption we inhabit. Necessarily,

stability and permanence exist only in the world of the intellect (*‘a¯ lam*

*al-‘aql*). (I.5–9)

Here al-Kind¯ı, characteristically synthesizing disparate strands of

ancient thought, combines a Stoic idea with a Neoplatonic idea. The

Stoic idea is that we should not base our happiness on things in the

physical world, because they are liable to be taken away from us.

Rather, we should only value what is permanent, namely – and here

is the Neoplatonic idea – the intellectual world, with its immaterial,

universal forms. Again, al-Kind¯ı anticipates later Arabic philosophy

even as he echoes Greek thought, by claiming that philosophy itself

is the highest good for humankind. For philosophy is the study of

universal forms and takes us away from our desires for the transient

things of this world. The afterlife al-Kind¯ı offers us is nothing more

nor less than an enduring grasp of these forms: a philosopher’s vision

of paradise.22

natural science

These considerations might lead one to expect that al-Kind¯ı would

have little interest in the strictly physical sciences. But nothing could

be further from the truth. Like other Neoplatonizing Aristotelians,

al-Kind¯ı believes that empirical science is an integral part of philosophy.

This is at least in part because knowledge of the sensible world

allows us to study God indirectly: as he says, “in things evident to

the senses there is a most manifest indication” of God and his providence

(214.9). In fact a large proportion of al-Kind¯ı’s lost works dealt

with the physical sciences, to judge by their titles, and several that

have been preserved do so as well. Two such sciences are particularly

well represented in the extant corpus: cosmology and optics.

*Cosmology and Astrology*

Like his successors in the Arabic philosophical tradition, al-Kind¯ı

accepts the cosmology handed down from Ptolemy and Aristotle,

according to which the earth is at the center of a spherical universe.

It is surrounded by spheres inwhich the planets are embedded (starting

with the moon and the sun, both of which are considered to be

planets), and ultimately by the sphere of the fixed stars. There is

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some hint in al-Kind¯ı that the soul will become associated with the

planetary spheres after death: he ascribes such a view to Pythagoras

in the*Discourse on the Soul*. But for al-Kind¯ı the most important role

played by the heavens is that they are the instrument of divine providence.

In an epistle devoted to explaining a passage in the Qur’ ¯an

that says the heavens “prostrate themselves” or “bow down” before

God (*On the Bowing of the Outermost Sphere*), al-Kind¯ı argues that

the stars must be alive, because they engage in a perfect and regular

circular motion around the earth. Indeed, he argues, the stars are

possessed of rational souls, and their motion is the result of their

obedience to the command of God.

This motion commanded by God is, as al-Kind¯ı puts it in the title

of another work, *The Proximate Agent Cause of Generation and*

*Corruption*. In other words, the heavens are the immediate cause

for all the things that come to be and perish in the world of the

four elements, the world below the moon. (The non-proximate, or

remote, original cause is of course God himself.) Al-Kind¯ı proves this

empirically: he says that we can all see that weather and the seasons

depend on the motions of the heavens, most obviously that of the

sun, and also points out that the appearance and character of people

varies depending on where in the world they live. This, too, is to

be ascribed to heavenly influence. Al-Kind¯ı has two incompatible

explanations of how this influence is brought about. In *Proximate*

*Agent Cause*, he draws on Alexander of Aphrodisias23 to argue that

the rotation of the heavenly spheres literally causes friction when

they move around each other and the sublunar world. This friction

stirs up the four elements, earth, air, fire, and water, combining them

to yield the production of all things in the natural world.

But in another work preserved only in Latin, entitled *On Rays*,

al-Kind¯ı gives a different explanation. This time he tries to subsume

the explanation of heavenly influence within a general account of

action at a distance. He says that many causes exercise their activity

via “rays,” which travel along straight lines. For example, fire

warms things by sending rays of heat in all directions. In the case of

the stars, the strongest influence from a star will be on the place on

the earth directly under it along a straight line. Clearly this explanation

differs from that given in the more Aristotelian *Proximate*

*Agent Cause*, and in fact the two texts have fundamentally different

views of physical interaction: *On Rays* explains interaction at

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a distance, while *Proximate Agent Cause* tries to reduce what is

apparently action at a distance to action by contact, namely the rubbing

of spheres that produces friction. This contrast will reappear in

al-Kind¯ı’s treatment of optics.

However their influence is explained, it seems that for al-Kind¯ı

the heavens are the direct cause of everything that happens in the

natural world. While their most obvious effects, such as the change

of seasons, can be predicted by anyone, there is also a science that

predicts less obvious events by analyzing the motion of the stars.

This is astrology. Many of al-Kind¯ı’s works, both extant and lost,

were devoted to applied astrology, and promised to help solve questions

such as “How can I find buried treasure?” “What is the most

auspicious time for me to take a journey?” and “How long will the

Arabs rule?” The contingencies of textual transmission magnified

the astrological side of al-Kind¯ı’s thought in subsequent centuries,

so that medievals reading him in Latin thought of al-Kind¯ı largely

as an astrologer. But they were not wrong in seeing astrology as an

important part of his thought, and it is no coincidence that the greatest

of Arabic astrologers, Abu¯ Ma‘shar al-Balkhı¯, was a student or

associate of al-Kind¯ı.24

Perhaps the most important aspect of al-Kind¯ı’s interest in the

heavens, from a philosophical point of view, is his assertion that

their motions are the instruments of divine providence. Here we

have simultaneously an affirmation of the universality of that providence,

insofar as all things in our world are brought about by the stars

and the stars are made to move by God, and an affirmation of the idea

that God’s providence can be grasped and even predicted through a

rational, empirical science (for this is what al-Kind¯ı believed astrology

tobe). At the same time his cosmology seems to be an application

of the distinction made in *On the True Agent*. God is the originative

source of action, and this action is merely transferred by his proximate

effect, the heavens, to the more remote effects, namely us and

the sublunar world in which we live.

*Optics*

In the case of optics, it is easier to see how al-Kind¯ı’s view responds

directly to the Greek philosophical tradition, even as he in some

respects anticipates the achievements of the great Ibn al-Haytham

(died 1041).25 Essentially al-Kind¯ı is caught between two authorities:

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Aristotle and Euclid. Al-Kind¯ı draws on both of them in numerous

works on vision, the most important of which (again, preserved only

in Latin) is *On Perspectives*, a reworking and expansion of Euclid’s

*Optics*.26 The conflicting influence of Aristotle and Euclid in optics

is at least as thorny a problem for al-Kind¯ı as the conflicting metaphysical

views of Aristotle and the Neoplatonists. For Aristotle,

vision occurs when a sensible formis transmitted to the eye through

a transparent medium, like air. The medium can only transmit the

sensible form when it is filled with light. Thus four things are

required for vision: a sensible object, an eye, a transparent medium

between eye and object, and light filling the medium. The optics

of Euclid, by contrast, offered geometrical constructions explaining

optical phenomena on the basis that vision and light always proceed

along straight lines. Such constructions are used, for example,

to explain how mirrors reflect images or light at certain angles, and

why shadows fall at certain lengths. The explanatory power of these

constructions raises problems for the Aristotelian theory. Al-Kind¯ı

repeats an example taken from Theon of Alexandria to illustrate the

difficulty: if we look at a circle from the side, we see a line, not a

circle. But according to Aristotle’s theory, a circle should only transmit

its own (circular) form through the medium. Aristotle cannot

explain why things look different from different angles.

For this and other reasons, al-Kind¯ı rejects the Aristotelian theory

of vision, which is an “intromission” theory: something (a sensible

form) must come into my eye from outside. Instead al-Kind¯ı accepts

an “extramission” theory, according to which our eyes send visual

rays out into the world.27 When these rays strike illuminated objects,

we see the objects. The advantage of this theory is that the rays

are straight lines, which accommodates the Euclidean geometrical

model of sight. Al-Kind¯ı applies the same model to the propagation

of light, and makes the significant advance of proposing that light

proceeds in straight lines and in all directions, from every point on

a luminous surface. This fits well with *On Rays*, which says that

things interact at a distance by virtue of rays that convey causal

power.28 In his works on vision al-Kind¯ı prefers this model of action

at a distance to the Aristotelian model of action by direct contact (the

eye touches the medium, which touches the object, and this allows

the form to go from object to medium to eye). Nevertheless, as we

saw above, he is still willing to speak elsewhere of the reception of

“sensible forms” in the case of vision and the other senses.

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al-kind￣ı and islam

Thus in the physical sciences, we see tensions analogous to those

found in al-Kind¯ı’s metaphysics. Inconsistencies may result, but al-

Kind¯ı always follows the same method of drawing on the ancients

and trying to smooth over such tensions as he is able. While it is thus

impossible to appreciate al-Kind¯ı’s works without knowledge of the

Greek tradition, it would be incorrect to say that the *only* interest

of his works is his reception and modification of Greek thought.

As indicated above, al-Kind¯ı tries to present Greek philosophy as

capable of solving problems of his own time, including problems

prompted by Islamic theological concerns. The most obvious sign

of this is that al-Kind¯ı uses philosophy to gloss Qur’ ¯anic texts. *On*

*the Bowing of the Outermost Sphere* explains why the Qur’ ¯an (55:6)

says that the heavens and trees “prostrate themselves” before God.

Al-Kind¯ı uses this as an opportunity to lay out the idea, discussed

above, that the heavens are the instrument of divine providence. He

prefaces this with a short lesson on how to deal with ambiguous

terms in interpretation of Scripture.

Another instance of Qur’ ¯anic exegesis is the aforementioned

digression on creation in *On the Quantity of Aristotle’s Books*. Here

part of Qur’ ¯an 36, which includes the declaration: “when God wills

something, his command is to say to it: ‘Be!’ and it is,” is the occasion

for al-Kind¯ı to argue that creation is bringing being from nonbeing.

He also provides a few remarks contrasting the prophet to the

philosopher. Philosophers must engage in long study, first mastering

introductory sciences like mathematics. Prophets, by contrast,

do not need any of this, but [only] the will of him who bestows their message

upon them, without time, occupation in study, or anything else . . .

Let us consider the answers given by the prophets to questions put to them

about secret and true matters. The philosopher may intend to answer such

questions with great effort, using his own devices, which he has at his disposal

due to long perseverance in inquiry and exercise. But we will find that

he does not arrive at what he seeks with anything like the brevity, clarity,

unerringness (*qurb al-sab¯ıl*), and comprehensiveness that is shown by the

answer of the Prophet. (373.7–15)

This is al-Kind¯ı’s most important statement about the nature of

prophecy. At first glance it seems to put the philosopher at quite a

disadvantage relative to the prophet. But on closer inspection we may

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rather be surprised at how limited is the superiority of the prophet.

This superiority is due only to two things: the ease and certaintywith

which he achieves the truth, and the way he presents it (his statement

is briefer, clearer, and more complete). The crucial implication

is that the *content* of the philosopher’s and the prophet’s knowledge

are the same.29 Certainly this makes sense of what al-Kind¯ı does

in both this text and *On the Bowing of the Outermost Sphere*: he

gives a philosophical explanation of a truth that is expressed more

succinctly and elegantly in the Qur’ ¯an.

Another significant text for al-Kind¯ı’s ideas about prophecy is his

epistle *On Sleep and Dream*. Here al-Kind¯ı draws on the psychology

he has presented in other works, with its division of the soul’s

faculties into those of sensation and of intellection. Associated with

the sensory faculties is the faculty Aristotle called “imagination”

(al-Kind¯ı uses both the Arabic term*quwwa mus.*

*awwira*, i.e., the faculty

that receives forms, and a transliteration of the Greek term

*phantasia*, 295.4–6). Imagination receives and entertains sensible

forms in the absence of their “bearers” – for example, it allows us to

picture an elephant even when there is no elephant in the room. It

also allows us to combine sensible forms to produce a merely imaginary

image, like a man with feathers. In sleep, when the use of

the senses ceases, the imagination may still be active, resulting in

the images we call dreams. Having established this, al-Kind¯ı goes

on to explain the phenomenon of the prophetic dream (*ru’ya¯* ). Persons

possessed of particularly “pure” and well-prepared souls can

actually receive the forms of sensible things in their imagination

before those things happen, and thus see into the future. This happens

most easily when the senses are not active, that is, when we

are dreaming. Now, al-Kind¯ı does not connect any of this to specifically

*religious* prophecy, nor does he say that God is the source of

the prophecy involved in dreams (as he does in *On the Quantity of*

*Aristotle’s Books* with regard to Muh.ammad’s prophecy).30 But it is

very tempting to compare this work of al-Kind¯ı’s to other naturalistic

explanations of the miraculous abilities of prophets, as criticized

by al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı in *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*.

Beyond the specific question of prophecy, the relevance of al-

Kind¯ı’s works for Islamic theology often remains implicit. But many

themes discussed above need to be understood against the background

of ninth-century Islam just as much as sixth-century Greek

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thought. From this point of view al-Kind¯ı’s most important interlocutors

are not Aristotelian commentators, but practitioners of

*kala¯m*, or rational theology, and especially theMu‘tazilites. Titles of

some of his lost works show that al-Kind¯ı engaged in detailed refutation

of some Mu‘tazilite views, especially their atomist physics.

Yet al-Kind¯ı seems to have been in agreement with several broader

positions that later writers would use, somewhat anachronistically,

to define the Mu‘tazilite “school” of the third/ninth century.31 For

example, the issue of divine attributes is a chief point of contact

between al-Kindı¯’s *falsafa* and the *kala¯m* of the Mu‘tazilites. For

both, a tendency toward negative theology is motivated by the need

to assert God’s absolute oneness. For the Mu‘tazilites, a plurality

of attributes distinct from God’s essence would violate *tawh. ¯ıd*, or

divine oneness. For, suppose that God is both good and merciful,

and that his goodness and his mercy are distinct from one another

and from God himself. Then we have not one but three things: God,

his goodness, and his mercy. This violates the requirement of Islam

that nothing else “share” in God’s divinity. In *kala¯m* of the time

this is often expressed by saying that nothing other than God can

be “eternal,” where “eternal” is taken to imply “uncreated.” Thus

the Mu‘tazilites also insisted that the Qur’ ¯an was created, and not

eternal alongside God himself, as some thought because the Qur’ ¯an

is God’s word. This contrast helps us to make sense of the otherwise

jarring juxtaposition of the argument against the eternity of

the world and the proof of God’s absolute oneness in al-Kind¯ı’s *On*

*First Philosophy*. As we have seen, al-Kind¯ı likewise takes the thesis

that the world is eternal as tantamount to the thesis that the world

is uncreated. Thus proving that the world is not eternal is closely

related to showing the absolute uniqueness and oneness of God.32

Al-Kind¯ı’s position as the first self-described philosopher of the

Islamic world makes him a transitional figure in several respects.

His philosophy is continuous with the ancient tradition, even as it

begins to respond to a very different intellectual milieu. To some

extent al-Kind¯ı’s reception of Greek philosophy set the agenda for

*falsafa* in the generations to come: for instance, his treatment of

intellect and theory of creation resonate throughout Arabic philosophy.

Above all, the attempt to assimilate Greek thought in al-Kind¯ı’s

circle proves the wider points that translation is always interpretation

and that philosophers can be at their most creative when they

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take up the task of understanding their predecessors. It would seem

that al-Kind¯ı aspired only to transmit Greek philosophy and display

its power and coherence. The best indication of his success is the

very tradition of philosophy in Arabic that he inaugurated.33 But a

corollary to this understanding of his project is that he had no intention

of being innovative or creative in the way I have described. He

meant to be unoriginal, and in this respect, he failed.

notes

1 See further Gutas [58].

2 For a useful overview of H.

unayn’s career see A. Z. Iskandar, “H.

unayn

Ibn Ish. ¯aq,” in *The Dictionary of Scientific Biography* (New York: 1978),

vol. XV (suppl. I), 230–49. A classic study of an epistle inwhichH.

unayn

describes his activities translating Galen isG. Bergstr ‥asser, “H.

unayn Ibn

Ish. a¯q u‥ ber die syrischen und arabischenGalenu‥ bersetzungen,”*Abhandlungen*

*fu¨ r die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 17.2 (1925).

3 The shortcomings of the al-Kind¯ı circle translations were obvious

enough to cause complaint. For instance, al-S. afad¯ı says that two of

al-Kind¯ı’s translators, Ibn N¯a‘ima al-H. ims. ¯ı and Ibn al-Bit.

r¯ıq, slavishly

translated their sources word for word, whereas theH.

unayn circle would

translate the sentence as a whole, and preserve its meaning. The passage

is translated in Rosenthal [39], 17.

4 The translation is one of those used by Averroes inhis long commentary

on the *Metaphysics*: Averroes, *Tafsı¯r ma¯ ba‘d al-t.abı¯‘a*, ed. M. Bouyges

(Beirut: 1973). See further A. Martin, “La *M´ etaphysique*: tradition syriaque

et arabe,” in Goulet [20], vol. I, 528–34.

5 See R.Arnzen,*Aristoteles* “*DeAnima*”: *Eine verlorene spa¨ tantike Paraphrase*

*in arabischer und persischer U¨ berlieferung* (Leiden: 1998). This

work may simply reflect the paraphrase of its Greek source.

6 Al-Kind¯ı’s works are cited from vol. I of al-Kind¯ı [70], with page and line

number given. (Improved editions,with facing-page French translations,

are appearing in a new series of volumes, al-Kind¯ı [71],with two volumes

having appeared so far.)

7 The list is found in Ibn al-Nad¯ım, *al-Fihrist*, ed. R. Tagaddod (Tehran:

1350 A.H./1950 A.D.), at 315–20, and trans. B. Dodge (New York: 1970),

at 615–26.

8 See the translation and commentary in Ivry [68].

9 See Gutas [93], 238–54.

10 See H. A. Davidson, “John Philoponus as a Source of Medieval, Islamic

and Jewish Proofs of Creation,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*

89 (1969), 357–91.

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11 Compare this to the proof of the One as first principle in the final proposition

of the *Book on the Pure Good* (*Liber de Causis*).

12 For this work see H. Ritter and R. Walzer, *Uno scritto morale inedito*

*di al-Kind¯ı* (Rome: 1938) and Druart [66].

13 An example of this tendency is al-Kind¯ı’s *Brief Statement on the Soul*,

which says of two remarks on the soul putatively from Plato and Aristotle,

“someone could think that there is a difference between these

two statements” (281.10), but goes on to explain how there is in fact no

disagreement between the two.

14 As Cristina D’Ancona has remarked, “one tends to forget that the intermingling

of Aristotle and Neoplatonism occurred primarily in the *Aristotelian*

works read within a Neoplatonic framework and only secondarily

in works like the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*,” in her review

of Arnzen, *Aristoteles* “*De Anima*,” *Oriens* 36 (2001), 340–51, at 344.

15 Simplicius, *Commentary on the* “*Physics*”, ed. H. Diels, *CAG*

IX–X (Berlin: 1882, 1895), 1363.

16 See the studies collected in D’Ancona [51]; R. C. Taylor, “Aquinas, the

*Plotiniana Arabica* and the Metaphysics of Being and Actuality,” *Journal*

*of the History of Ideas* 59 (1998), 241–64; and my *The Arabic Plotinus:*

*A Philosophical Study of the* “*Theology of Aristotle*” (London:

2002), ch. 5.

17 As shown in Adamson [62].

18 See Jolivet [69], which shows that *On the Intellect* depends on Philoponus.

19 In *That There Are Separate Substances*, al-Kind¯ı proves that the human

soul is immaterial by showing that it is the species of the human and

therefore an intelligible object. This is another application of the distinction

between sensible and intellectual forms: the soul is a form of

the latter kind. The terminology allows al-Kind¯ı to remain nominally

faithful to Aristotle’s definition of soul as the “form of the body.”

20 See C. Genequand, “Platonism and Hermeticism in al-Kind¯ı’s *f¯ı*

*al-Nafs*,” *Zeitschrift fu¨ r Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften*

4 (1987/8), 1–18, and my “Two Early Arabic Doxographies

on the Soul: Al-Kind¯ı and the ‘Theology of Aristotle,’” *The Modern*

*Schoolman* 77 (2000), 105–25.

21 See above, n. 12.

22 For a different understanding of *On the Art of Dispelling Sorrows* see

below, chapter 13.

23 As shown in S. Fazzo and H. Wiesner, “Alexander of Aphrodisias in

the Kind¯ı-Circle and in al-Kind¯ı’s Cosmology,” *Arabic Sciences and*

*Philosophy* 3 (1993), 119–53.

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24 Seemy “Abu¯ Ma‘shar, al-Kindı¯ and the Philosophical Defense of Astrology,”

*Recherches de philosophie et th´eologie m´edi ´evales* 69 (2002),

245–70.

25 See D. C. Lindberg, “Alkindi’s Critique of Euclid’s Theory of Vision,”

*Isis* 62 (1971), 469–89.

26 Al-Kind¯ı [71], vol. I, 438–523.

27 This theory may be compared with that of Plato, *Timaeus*, 45b–46c.

28 For a study comparing *On Rays* and *On Perspectives*, see P. Travaglia,

*Magic, Causality, and Intentionality: The Doctrine of Rays in al-Kind¯ı*

(Turnhout: 1999).

29 For a similar interpretation see Endress [15], 8.

30 This may be contrasted to the Arabic version of Aristotle’s *Parva Naturalia*,

which does explicitly name God as the source of prophetic dreams:

see S. Pines, “The Arabic Recension of the *Parva Naturalia*,” *Israel*

*Oriental Studies* 4 (1974), 104–53, at 130–2.

31 So-called “Mu‘tazilites” often argued bitterlywith one another and were

not yet a unified school with a single body of doctrines. The best source

of information on *kala¯m* in this period is van Ess [44].

32 For further discussion of al-Kind¯ı’s relationship to the Mu‘tazilites, see

Adamson [62].

33 Here it may be helpful to say something about al-Kind¯ı’s direct legacy.

Abu¯ Ma‘shar, the astrologer who has already been mentioned above,

was a significant associate, and two of his students were al-Sarakhs¯ı (on

whom see F. Rosenthal, *Ah.mad b. at.*

*-T. ayyib as-Sarakhs¯ı* [New Haven,

CT: 1943]) and Abu¯ Zayd al-Balkhı¯. Abu¯ Zayd lived long enough to

be the teacher of the fourth/tenth-century philosopher al-‘A¯ mirı¯, who

drew on al-Kind¯ı and the works produced in his circle. Al-Kind¯ı also

directly influenced other Neoplatonic thinkers in this later period, like

Ibn Miskawayh. But around the same time al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı did not favor al-

Kind¯ı’s synthesis of Greek thought, as mentioned above. Avicenna’s

preference for the Farabian view over the Kindian may explain why al-

Kind¯ı receives scant attention in the later tradition, dominated as it was

by the task of responding to Avicenna. For the tradition through Abu¯

Zayd and al-‘A¯ mirı¯, see E. Rowson, “The Philosopher as *Litte´ rateur*:

Al-Tawh. ı¯dı¯ and his Predecessors,” *Zeitschrift fu¨ r Geschichte der*

*arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften* 6 (1990), 50–92, and E. Rowson,

*A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate: Al-‘A¯mirı¯‘s*

*“Kita¯b al-Amad ‘ala¯ l-abad”* (New Haven: 1988). For fourth/tenthcentury

Neoplatonism see also J. Kraemer, *Philosophy in the Renaissance*

*of Islam: Abu¯ Sulayma¯n al-Sijista¯nı¯ and his Circle* (Leiden:

1986).

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4 Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı and the philosophical

curriculum

life and works

The philosophy of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı stands in marked distinction to that of

al-Kind¯ı but is no less representative of the major trends of thought

inherited by the Islamic world. His tradition is consciously constructed

as a continuation and refinement of the neo-Aristotelianism

of the Alexandrian tradition, adapted to the new cultural matrix of

the Near East. The Neoplatonic element of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s thought is

most obvious in the emanationist scheme that forms a central part

of his cosmology, though that scheme is much more developed than

that of earlier Neoplatonists in its inclusion of the Ptolemaic planetary

system. His theory of the intellect appears to be based on a

close reading of Alexander of Aphrodisias and develops the concept

of an Active Intellect standing outside the human intellect. Above

all, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s legacy to later thinkers is a highly sophisticated noetics

placedwithin a rigorous curriculum of instruction inAristotelian

logic. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı was above all a systematic and synthesizing philosopher;

as such, his system would form the point of departure on all

the major issues of philosophy in the Islamic world after him.

The status accorded al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s intellectual legacy here stands

somewhat at odds with what we can reconstruct of his life with any

certainty. With the exception of a few simple facts, virtually nothing

is known of the personal circumstances and familial background

of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı.1 The great variety of legends and anecdotes about this

second major philosopher of the Islamic period is the product of

contending biographical traditions produced nearly three centuries

after his death. Documentary evidence (in the form of manuscript

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notations and incidental biographical information in his works) provide

the most solid pieces of evidence we have.

Ourmost authoritative sources agree that his name was Abu¯ Nas.r

Muh.ammad b.Muh.ammad.His familial origins are recorded as alternately

in F¯ar¯ab, Khur¯as¯an or Fary¯ab, Turkist ¯an. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı tells us

himself that he studied logic, specifically the Aristotelian *Organon*

up to the *Posterior Analytics*, with the Christian cleric Yuh. ann¯a b.

Hayl¯an inBaghdad, where al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı spent the larger part of his life and

composed the majority of his works. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s chief student was

the Christian Yah. y¯a b. ‘Ad¯ı and he wrote a treatise on astrology for

the Christian Abu¯ Ish. a¯q Ibra¯hı¯m al-Baghda¯dı¯. This association with

Christian scholarly circles in Baghdad links al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı to the Syriac

neo-Aristotelian tradition which in turn was heir to the Alexandrian

scholarly world of the centuries preceding Islam. In Baghdad, al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı must also have had some contact with personalities of the

‘Abba¯ sid court, since he composed his *Great Book on Music* for Abu¯

Ja‘far al-Karkh¯ı, the minister of the Caliph al-R¯ad. ¯ı (reigned 934–40).

From a series of notes detailing the composition of his work *The*

*Principles of the Opinions of the People of the Excellent City*, we

know that al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı left Baghdad in 942 C.E. for Damascus, Syria,

where he completed the work. He also spent some time in Aleppo,

the seat of the Hamd¯anid prince Sayf al-Dawla. Around 948–9 al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı visited Egypt, then under the control of the Fatimids. Shortly

after, he must have returned to Damascus, since we know that he

died there in 950–1, “under the protection of” Sayf al-Dawla.2

These biographical facts are paltry in the extreme but we must

resist the urge to embellish them with fanciful stories, as the

medieval biographers did, or engage in idle speculation about al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s ethnicity or religious affiliation on the basis of contrived

interpretations of his works, as many modern scholars have done.

Rather, the very paucity of any substantial biographical information

about al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı in the immediate period after his death suggests

that any intellectual influence he may have exerted during

his life was almost nugatory. However, this does not mean that

the program of philosophical education adumbrated in al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s

works and indeed his very real and often original intellectual contributions

are not of paramount importance to understanding the

development of philosophy in the Islamic world. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s status

would be rehabilitated a half-century later by Avicenna, the next

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great philosopher of the Islamic east, on whom al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s interpretation

of Aristotle would have a profound effect. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s particular

method of philosophical education would be carried on by the Baghdad

school of scholarly interpretation of Aristotle, chiefly through

his student Yah. y¯a b. ‘Ad¯ı. Finally, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s works formed the point

of departure for numerous later scholars of Andalusia, including Ibn

B¯ajja and, in his youth, Averroes. However, as has been said before,

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı appears to have gone through life unnoticed;3 this being the

case, we must focus on the legacy of his thought.

Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s works can broadly be divided into three categories.4

(1) Introductory works (prolegomena) to the study of philosophy,

including “pre-philosophical ethics,”5 as well as basic

introductions to the study of logic, and the works of Plato

and Aristotle. This category includes the historical and educational

ethics “trilogy” *The Attainment of Happiness* –

*The Philosophy of Plato* – *The Philosophy of Aristotle* (as

well as the supplementary *Harmony of Plato and Aristotle*)

and the logical “trilogy” *Directing Attention to the Way to*

*Happiness* – *Terms used in Logic* – *Paraphrase of the “Categories.”*

A number of other works fill out this group of elementary

textbooks, including his *Prolegomena to the Study*

*of Aristotle’s Philosophy*. This genre has its roots again in the

Alexandrian tradition of teaching philosophy. For instance,

in the *Prolegomena* we find nine of the ten traditional points

enumerated in that tradition for basic instruction before taking

up a serious study of philosophy.6 Also important here is

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s *Enumeration of the Sciences*, which would enjoy

great popularity in the Muslim and Latin Christian worlds

after al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı.

(2) Commentaries on and paraphrases of the *Nicomachean*

*Ethics* and the entire Aristotelian *Organon*, along with the

by-then common introduction (*Isagoge*) of Porphyry, paraphrased

in numerous ways by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı. An important characteristic

of this group of writings is al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s extension

of the logical curriculum beyond the traditional end in the

midst of the *Prior Analytics*, as taught in the later Alexandrian

school and continued by Christian logicians writing in

Syriac.

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(3) Original works in which al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s syncretistic approach to

philosophy presents a unified presentation of all aspects of

philosophy, accompanied again by an idealized approach to

its study. The best known of these works are *The Principles of*

*the Opinions*, mentioned above, and *The Principles of Beings*

(also known as *Governance of Cities*).

The al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ıan corpus is almost single-mindedly driven by the

combined goals of rehabilitating and then reinventing the scholarly

study of philosophy as practiced by the Alexandrian school of

neo-Aristotelianism. In this regard, he is rightly called the “second

master” (after Aristotle) and he is self-proclaimed heir of that tradition.

There is also distinct emphasis on situating that curriculum of

philosophical study within the new cultural context of the Islamic

empire. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s conscious articulation of his inheritance of the

Alexandrian curriculum of philosophy is found in a “mythologizing”

account of the transmission of that school to its new cultural setting.

In his *Appearance of Philosophy*, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı tells us:

Philosophy as an academic subject became widespread in the days of the

[Ptolemaic] kings of the Greeks after the death of Aristotle in Alexandria

until the end of the woman’s [i.e., Cleopatra’s] reign. The teaching [of it]

continued unchanged in Alexandria after the death of Aristotle through the

reign of thirteen kings . . . Thus it went until the coming of Christianity.

Then the teaching came to an end in Rome while it continued in Alexandria

until the king of the Christians looked into the matter. The bishops assembled

and took counsel together on which [parts] of [Aristotle’s] teaching

were to be left in place and which were to be discontinued. They formed the

opinion that the books on logic were to be taught up to the end of the assertoric

figures [*Prior Analytics*, I.7] but not what comes after it, since they

thought that would harm Christianity. [Teaching the] rest [of the logical

works] remained private until the coming of Islam [when] the teaching was

transferred from Alexandria to Antioch. There it remained for a long time

[until] only one teacher was left. Two men learned from him, and they left,

taking the books with them. One of them was fromH.

arr ¯an, the other from

Marw. As for the man from Marw, two men learned from him . . . , Ibr ¯ah¯ım

al-Marwaz¯ı and Yuh. ann¯a ibn H.

ayl¯an. [Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı then says he studied with

Yuh.

ann¯a up to the end of the *Posterior Analytics*.]7

There are a number of important points to be made about this

account, many of which provide the basis for an interesting study

of the historiography of philosophy in the early medieval period. For

our purposes, we may observe first that al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı makes absolutely

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no reference to his predecessor al-Kind¯ı (d. after 870) or his elder

contemporary Abu¯ Bakr al-Ra¯zı¯ (d. ca. 925–35). Clearly, al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯ did

not consider their approach to philosophy a viable or accurate one.

Second, there is a conscious stylization of the rebirth of the philosophical

curriculum after the restrictions placed on the study of logic

by the Christians; in the Islamic period, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı studied beyond the

*Prior Analytics*, thus learning from his teacher Yuh. ann¯a the demonstrative

syllogism of the *Posterior Analytics*. As we will see, the valorization

of the demonstrative method for philosophy is a singularly

important element in al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s view. Finally, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s account is

designed to link his own work with a long history of studying philosophy,

thus lending pedigree to the “new” curriculum of philosophy

he envisioned for its practitioners under Islamic rule.

metaphysics and cosmology

To provide a concise and accurate account of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s philosophy

remains problematic for a number of reasons. First, it is only in the

past three decades or so that his works have received modern critical

editions and much evaluation and scholarly discussion remains to

be done. Second, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı presents his philosophy as a unified treatment

of all reality in which ontology, epistemology, and cosmology

converge in an idealized historical and above all normative account

of the universe. The piecemeal studies of very discrete aspects of his

thought to date have not yet accounted for all aspects of this synthesis.

Below, I endeavor to account for this whole in a general fashion,

with reference to some of the more important studies of the past few

decades, and following in the main the outline of his *Principles of*

*Beings*.8

Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s cosmology integrates an Aristotelian metaphysics of

causation with a highly developed version of Plotinian emanationism

situated within a planetary order taken over from Ptolemaic

astronomy.9 The combination of the first two elements is not surprising,

given the development of Neoplatonism prior to al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı.

The latter element, drawn from Ptolemy’s *Planetary Hypotheses*, is

perhaps al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s original contribution, although this is surmised

only in the absence of any identifiable source prior to him. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı

presents six “principles” (*maba¯di‘*) of being in the system: (1) the

First Cause, (2) the Secondary Causes, i.e., incorporeal Intellects,

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(3) the Active Intellect governing the sublunar world, (4) Soul, (5)

Form, and (6) Matter. The emanationist scheme presented by al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı is a hierarchical descent from the First Cause through “Secondary

Causes,” or Intellects associated with the nine celestial

spheres, to a final tenth Intellect which governs the sublunar world.

In al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s presentation, Aristotle’s causation of motion, which

accounts for the revolutions of the spheres, is developed into a causation

of being and intellection, in which each stage in the process

imparts reality to the next and is structured according to a descending

act of intellection. The First Cause (al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı says “one should

believe that it is God”) is the incorporeal First Mover, in that the

celestial spheres move out of desire for It. This First Cause, in thinking

itself, emanates the incorporeal being of the first intellect. In turn

this first intellect thinks of the First Cause and of itself; this “multiplicity”

of thought produces, in the first intellection, the second

intellect and, in the second intellection, the substantiation of a soul

and body for the next stratum. This process of emanating intellect,

soul, and body descends through the nine intellects of the spheres.

The first intellect is associatedwith the first heaven, identified as the

outer sphere of the universe, rotating in a diurnal motion and moving

the other spheres within its confines. The second intellect is associated

with the sphere of the fixed stars which, in its own rotation,

produces the precession of the equinoxes. Each intellect thereafter

is associated with one of the “planets” known in al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s time:

Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon. The

final intellect, which al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı calls the Active or Agent Intellect

(*al-‘aql al-fa“a¯ l*), governs the world of generation and corruption,

namely, the four elements (earth, air, fire, water), minerals, plants,

and both non-rational animals and rational animals (humans).10

This may be viewed as a very bizarre system indeed, but in its

subtle complexity it accounts for nearly every element of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s

philosophy and nicely incorporates the astronomical knowledge of

his day. By placing the emanationist scheme within a tidier Ptolemaic

astronomy, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s system does away with the philosophically

messy fifty-five or more incorporeal movers of Aristotelian

metaphysics. By positing an emanation of being and intellection, the

system accounts not only for incorporeal and corporeal gradations

of being in a manner consistent with logical division, but also for

the process of intellection, and thus ultimately noetics. The crucial

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element in the scheme in this last regard is the presence of the Active

Intellect governing this world, of which we will have more to say

below. Other interpretations of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s reasons for adopting an

emanationist scheme that he knew was non-Aristotelian have been

suggested,11 but it is clear that without such a system, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı

felt there was no means by which humans could know, however

remotely, the divine, nor account for the diversity presented to

humans in their analysis of the universe. Another interesting observation

is that al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı did not hesitate to refer to the various supralunar

incorporeal beings in terms recognizable to monotheists. For

instance, he says that one ought to call the Intellects the “spirits”

and “angels,” and the Active Intellect the “Holy Spirit,” i.e., the

angel of revelation. This is a stroke of rhetorical genius, designed to

make palatable to the monotheists of his day (i.e., not exclusively

Muslim) the older Greek order of celestial gods.12

It is worth concentrating on a few of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s arguments concerning

the First Cause (*al-sabab al-awwal*), since they provide us

with interesting insights into the manner inwhich metaphysics and

epistemology come to be combined in his thought. In the *Principles*

*of the Opinions*, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı tells us that

The First cannot be divided in speech into the thingswhich would constitute

Its substance. For it is impossible that each part of the statement that would

explain the meanings of the First could denote each of the parts by which

the substance of the First is so constituted. If this were the case, *the parts*

*which constitute Its substance would be causes of Its existence, in the way*

*that meanings denoted by parts of the definition of a thing are causes of*

*the existence of the thing defined*, e.g., in the way that matter and form are

causes of the existence of things composed of them. But this is impossible

with regard to the First, since It is the First and Its existence has no cause

whatsoever.13

The negative theology by which al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı approaches his discussion

of the First Cause is designed to demonstrate that It cannot be

known through the classical process of dialectical division (*diairesis*)

and definition (*horismos*) and hence cannot directly be known by

the human intellect. Moreover, we find an additional element here in

which logical analysis reflects ontology. The things *said* in defining

a being are those things that *actually constitute its substance*. This

is a realist trend that can be traced to Porphyry’s *Isagoge* and informs

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the centuries of debate about the place of the Aristotelian *Categories*

in metaphysics. In the above quotation, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı gives as examples

only the Aristotelian material and formal causes. Elsewhere in the

same work, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı draws on the Porphyrian “tree” of genera and

species:

[The First Cause] is different in Its substance from everything else, and it

is impossible for anything else to have the existence It has. For between

the First and whatever were to have the same existence as the First, there

could be no difference (*mubayana*, *diaphora*) and no distinction at all. Thus,

there would not be two things but one essence only, because, if there were

a difference between the two, that in which they differed would not be the

same as that which they shared, and thus *that point of difference between*

*the two would be a part of that which substantiates the existence of both*,

and that which they have in common the other part. Thus *each of them*

*would be divisible in speech, and each of the two parts would be a cause*

*for the substantiation of its existence*, and then it would not be the First but

there would be an existent prior to It and a cause for Its existence – and that

is impossible.14

Here, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı is demonstrating that the components of definition,

namely, the genus and the difference of a thing, are of no use in discussing

the First Cause, but again (as we see in the italicized statements

above), al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı has a clear conception that these elements

not only allow one to talk about things (albeit not the First Cause!)

but also to identify their ontological reality. Furthermore, the idea

that the genus and difference of a thing *precede* (not temporally but

causally) the thing defined is a transferal of the status of the Aristotelian

causes (e.g., the example of matter and form in the first

quotation) to the predicables of Porphyry’s *Isagoge*.

The entire hierarchical edifice of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s emanation of being

and intellect can be analyzed in terms of this classification by division

into genera and species. Setting aside the First Cause, which

alone is one, deficiency and multiplicity serve as the essential properties

in the descending levels of substances. The incorporeal substances,

i.e., the Intellects of the spheres, do not require a substrate

for substantiation but are nonetheless deficient in the sense that

their being derives from something “more perfect” (the First Cause).

Moreover, they exhibit a multiplicity in the act of intellection: they

intellect not only themselves (like the First Cause) but also the

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intellect that causally precedes them. However, these Intellects are

more perfect than the human intellect in that, first, they are always

actually intellecting and second, the object of that act of intellection

is what is intelligible in itself, always separate from matter. The

souls of the spheres, that is, their forms, thus have only the faculty

of intellection which, in the desire to emulate what precedes them,

serves to set in motion each of the associated spheres. A disjunction

occurs at the level of the Active Intellect governing the sublunar

world. Whereas the preceding intellects produce both a following

intellect and its soul and celestial sphere, the Active Intellect affects

only the human intellect in the world below it. Matter and form in

the sublunar world, on the other hand, are produced by the differing

motions of the celestial spheres.15

At the sublunar level, in the world of generation and corruption,

complexity informs every species of being. Form (*s.*

*u¯ ra*) and matter

(*ma¯dda*) are the lowest principles of being and together (in need of

one another, since neither subsists in itself) constitute corporeal substance.

Matter is the pure potentiality to be something. Form causes

corporeal substance actually to be that something. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı uses

two familiar tropes: in the case of a bed, wood is the potential and

formgives it its essential definition as a bed; and in the case of sight,

the eye is the matter and vision is the form. At its simplest, the forms

of the four elements earth, air, fire, and water constitute one species,

since the matter that can be, say, earth, can also be water. The “mixture”

of the elements produces a gradation of corporeal substances:

mineral, plant, non-rational animal, and rational animal.

psychology and the soul

Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s treatment of the corporeal soul and its “faculties” or

“powers” (sing. *quwwa*) draws on a basic Aristotelian outline but

is also one informed by the commentary tradition (particularly, it

seems, pseudo-Alexander of Aphrodisias and Plotinus) that stands

between him and the “first master.” A number of basic faculties

constitute the human soul: the appetitive (the desire for or aversion

to an object of sense), the sensitive (perception by the senses

of corporeal substances), the imaginative (which retains images of

sensible objects after they are perceived and combines and separates

them to a variety of ends), and the rational.16 The graduated level

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of souls, from plant to animal to human, reserves the faculty of reasoning,

the ability to intellect (*‘aqala*),17 for the human soul, which

also exercises the others. This faculty, also called the “rational soul,”

alone survives the death of the body.

Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s vision of the world around him is fittingly complex,

but the various elements are logically structured and the whole is

informed by a teleological principle; each level of being is characterized

by the quest for the perfection appropriate to it, a perfection

which in each case mirrors that of the First Cause, by seeking to be

like it. What constitutes human perfection? Since continuous and

actual intellection is the goal of rational beings, and since man possesses

an intellect, the goal, or “ultimate happiness (*sa‘a¯da*),” ofman

is that continuous and actual act of intellecting.

The integration of metaphysics and noetics in al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s system

assures humans that they *can* know the structure of the universe

and, ultimately, the principles that inform that structure.18

However, there are two caveats to this. First, a person is not born

with an actual intellect; that intellect must be developed in a very

precise manner if it is to achieve the perfection of its being. Second,

the inequality of being and intellect observable in the vertical

emanationist hierarchy is replicated at the horizontal level: not all

humans can develop their intellect in the same manner or to the same

degree.

Because the human intellect is associated with corporeal matter,

it represents only the potential, in the earliest stages of cognition, to

achieve the perfection unique to it. The task of the Active Intellect is

to initiate that process leading to perfection. As al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı says: “The

action of the Active Intellect is the providence of the rational animal,

to seek its attainment of the highest grade of perfection appropriate

to man, which is supreme happiness, that is, that man arrive at the

level of the Active Intellect.”19

Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı identifies the incorporeal Active Intellect as the agent

that brings the human material intellect (*‘aql bi-al-quwwa*, *in potentia*)

into action, in other words, causes humans to think.20 This is an

amplification of standard Aristotelian causality developed in the preceding

centuries of commentary on the basis of the recondite comments

of Aristotle in his *De Anima* (III.5). In addition to locating

that agent outside of the human intellect, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı also employs the

common metaphor of light to explain this process. He says:

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The relation of the Active Intellect to man is like that of the sun to vision.

Sun gives to vision light, and by the light acquired from the sun, vision actually

sees, when before it had only the potential to see. By that light, vision

sees the sun itself, which is the cause for it actually seeing, and furthermore

actually sees the colors which previously were [only] potentially the objects

of vision. The vision that was potential thereby becomes actual. In the same

manner, the Active Intellect provides man with something that it imprints

in his rational faculty. The relation of that thing to the rational soul is that

of light to vision. Through that thing the rational soul intellects the Active

Intellect. Through it, the things that are potentially intelligible become actually

intelligible. And through it, man, who is potentially intellect, becomes

actually and perfectly an intellect, until it all but reaches the level of the

Active Intellect. So [man] becomes an intellect *per se* after he was not, and

an intelligible *per se* after he was not, and becomes a divine [substance] after

being a material one. This is what the Active Intellect does.21

Condensed in this metaphorical presentation is a process of actuating

man’s reason which al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı develops in detail. The human

intellect is initially “material,” that is, humans at first have only

the potential to think. But they also possess senses and the ability to

retain the objects of sense in the “imaginative” faculty. The initial

act of a human is to sense the objects of the world and to store images

of those particular things. The process of thinking, however, requires

the ability to convert those particular material things to universal

“intelligibles” (*ma‘qu¯ la¯ t*), in order for one to develop the connections

that form the basis of the logical process of defining and ordering

the objects of the world. This conversion is effected by an external

agent identified as the Active Intellect governing the sublunar

world.

What is the nature of this initial alteration, in which the material

intellect becomes an actual intellect (*‘aql bi-al-fi‘l*)? The metaphor

of the effect of the sun’s light on vision is, perhaps, the only means

of approximating what occurs.22 The Active Intellect brings about

a change in the material intellect of the human in which the particular

objects of sense are stripped of their material properties and

“converted” into intelligibles that have no connection to matter.

Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı gives examples of these “primary intelligibles”: the principle

that the whole is greater than the part; the principle that

objects equal inmagnitude to another object are equal to one another.

By intellecting such primary intelligibles, the intellect becomes an

actual intellect.23 Furthermore, as we see in the above passage, the

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human intellect now intellects the Active Intellect. In knowing

something, the intellect becomes that thing, according to the Aristotelian

dictum.24 To what degree this systematization of Aristotle’s

epistemology, through its combination of causality and identity, is

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s original contribution or is culled from the commentary

tradition remains open to debate.

While the process of actualizing the human intellect would appear

mechanistic in its earliest stage, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı is committed to a human

voluntarism at the next stage of the process, the development of what

he calls the “acquired intellect” (*‘aql mustafa¯d*). As al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯ states

in explaining his understanding of Aristotle’s philosophy: “man is

one of the beings not given their perfection at the outset. He is rather

one of those given only the least of their perfections and, in addition,

principles for laboring (either by nature or by will and choice) toward

perfection.”25 Indeed, evenwithinhis discussion of the act of sensing

and imagining (i.e., those actions man shares with animals), volition

plays a significant role, albeit at the basest level of desire or aversion.

The particular type of will associated with the actual intellect al-

Fa¯ ra¯bı¯ terms choice (*ikhtiya¯ r*), through which man actually chooses

to behave in a manner that is moral or immoral, and it is through his

choice that man can seek or not seek happiness.

It is at this juncture that al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s “curricular works,” especially

those concerning “pre-philosophical ethics,”26 find their place in

his program for the development of the philosopher. In them, al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı, following broadly the outlines of Aristotle’s ethical works

(particularly the *Nicomachean Ethics*), undertakes the definition of

“happiness” through a dialectical discussion of contrasting views:

what is thought to constitute happiness and what actually is happiness.

The good that leads to happiness is produced either by

nature or by will. In the former case, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı sees the role of the

celestial bodies as contributing, in an involuntary manner, to what

leads to good or obstructs the way to good. As he says: “individual

human beings are made by nature with unequal powers and different

propensities.”27 Voluntarily choosing good and evil, by contrast, is

directly the provenance of the human will. That education is necessary

is obvious to al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı:

not everyone is disposed to know happiness on his own, or the things that

he ought to do, but needs a teacher and a guide for this purpose. Some men

need little guidance, others a great deal of it. In addition, even when a man

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is guided by these two [that is, happiness and the actions leading to it], he

will not, in the absence of external stimulus and something to rouse him,

necessarily do what he has been taught and guided to do. This is how most

men are. Therefore they need someone to make all this known to them and

rouse them to do it.28

It is at this practical level of human commitment to choosing the

good that the human actual intellect initiates the process of becoming

“like” the Active Intellect. By habituating themselves to virtuous

actions (the Aristotelian “mean”) and, equally important, to

the correct mode of deliberating about what constitutes good action,

humans develop what al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı calls the faculty of the rational intellect

directed toward practical things (*quwwa ‘aqliyya ‘amaliyya*),

that is, things humans can do or affect or produce.29 Another aspect of

the rational faculty is that termed the “theoretical” faculty (*quwwa*

*‘aqliyya ‘ilmiyya*). This is usually defined negatively, that is, as the

faculty concerned with objects of knowledge that humans cannot

do or affect or produce.30 It is clear, however, that al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı has in

mind the faculty of the rational intellect (*quwwa n¯ at.*

*iqa*) directed

not simply to the beneficial, that is, what is virtuous in individual

and social behavior and thought, but rather to what constitutes true

happiness: philosophy, or knowledge of the existing things that by

nature are simply to be known.

The broad division between practical and theoretical philosophy

was well established in philosophical curricula by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s time.

Practical sciences covered ethics, “governance of the household”

(economics), and “governance of cities” (“politics”), all of which lead

to happiness in the arenas of individual action and social interaction.

Theoretical sciences included mathematics (the quadrivium), what

is called “physics” or natural philosophy (the study of the world

and its constituent parts, including man’s soul, i.e., psychology), and

the supreme science containing the principles of investigation of

all other sciences: metaphysics. Study of the theoretical sciences

leads to the ultimate human happiness: the perfection of the human

soul. Again, it is significant that the philosophical curriculum was

ordered on the basis of the two different objects of knowledge themselves

informed by the very structure of the universe. On the basis

of this division in the objects of knowledge, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı catalogs the

two levels of epistemology (classified by the Aristotelian practical

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and theoretical sciences), again consciously links them to his ontology

(these sciences comprise what is actually real), and finally orders

them in the evolution of human thought, both historically (this was

the sequence in the progression of human knowledge) and on an

individual level (this is the way humans learn to think).

logic and the education of the philosopher

In both classes of the practical and theoretical sciences, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s

curriculum emphasizes the necessity of studying logic, the supreme

tool of scientific inquiry and the only means by which humans

can perfect the ability to deliberate well about different objects of

thought, and more significantly, guard the mind against error. The

larger bulk of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s extant works concern the various types

of logical inquiry and discourse. This is fitting, given the central

place occupied by the Aristotelian *Organon* in the commentary tradition

of the Alexandrian neo-Aristotelians and indeed in the Baghdad

Aristotelian school, founded by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s teachers.31

Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s commentaries and paraphrases of logic encompass the

entire Aristotelian *Organon* (*Categories*, *De Interpretatione*, *Prior*

and *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, *Sophistical Refutations*, *Rhetoric*,

and *Poetics*) along with Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, the customary introduction

to the whole, and finally, original works that focus on the

relationship between logic and language.32 This comprehensiveness

represents a culminating stage in the process of updating the tradition

of studying logic in the Christian Syriac intellectual context.

Where before, students stoppedmidway through the *Prior Analytics*,

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s new curriculum emphasized knowledge of the entirety of

the syllogistic and non-syllogistic arts with a special emphasis on

the demonstrative syllogism as the means to certain truth.

It is only relatively recently that editions of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s logical

works have been published, and so comprehensive study of his contributions

to the field remain to be undertaken. However, recent

scholarship has emphasized two aspects of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s thought in this

area: his treatment of logic and grammar; and his conception of what

constitutes certainty in human thought and the relation of that view

to how he ordered the levels of logical discourse.33

Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s attention to the relative valorizations of logic and

grammar is a product of his inheritance of the neo-Aristotelian

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tradition of teaching philosophy, in which discussions about grammar

and logic had already been combined.34 It has also been suggested

that al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s concern here was a direct response to a debate

in his time over the relative disciplinary merits of logic and Arabic

grammar. This debate was presented in idealized formas a rhetorical

battle between the logician Abu¯ Bishr Matta¯ b. Yu¯ nus, who argued

for the universal applicability of logic as a type of meta-language, and

the grammarian al-S¯ır ¯ af¯ı, who scorned the “foreign” science of logic,

given that the Arabs had Arabic grammar to aid them in guarding

against methodological errors.35 Modern scholarship on this issue

has grown considerably in recent years, and whether or not al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı

is really concernedwith developing Aristotelian logic as a type of universal

grammar remains itself open to debate. In any case, it would

appear at the very least that al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı was trying to “naturalize” the

*Organon* in the Arabic language by explaining its technical terms in

the plain language of his day. In all of his introductory works on logic,

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı provides examples of the transfer of terms from their daily

usage to the technical senses they require for logic. Furthermore, he

argues that “the relation of grammar to language and expressions

is like the relation of logic to the intellect and the intelligibles.”36

An additional example of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s “naturalization” of logic can be

seen in his explanation of the analogical reasoning employed by the

jurists and theologians of his day in terms of Aristotelian rhetoric.37

A much broader, and potentially more fruitful, discussion of al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s treatment of logic concerns his theory of certitude (*yaq¯ın*)

and the graded ranks of the different syllogisms in termsof their value

for arriving at scientific certitude and explaining such according to

people’s varying abilities. In most basic form, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı identifies

two actions of the humanmind, “conceptualization” (*tas.awwur*) and

“assent” (*tas.d¯ıq*).38 Conceptualization occurs when the mind conceives

simple concepts (terms) with the aim of defining their essential

nature. Assent is directed toward complex concepts (premises)

and results in the affirmation of their truth or falsity. “Perfect assent”

is the mental judgment that produces complete certitude, not only

that the object of thought is truly such a thing but also that one’s

knowledge of it is equally true and cannot be otherwise.39 Again,

we see al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s assimilation of epistemology and ontology: in perfect

form, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s certitude assures us that the knowledge of a

thing is that thing itself. Now, clearly not all conceptualizations and

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assents produce this level of certainty, and it is here that al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s

“context theory” of Aristotelian syllogistic plays a role.40 Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı

divides the books of the *Organon* according to their subjects. The

*Categories*, *De Interpretatione*, and the *Prior Analytics* are applicable

to all modes of discourse. The following books, treating syllogisms

in the following sequence, cover the full range of mental assent

and verbal explanation: demonstrative (*Posterior Analytics*), dialectical

(*Topics*), rhetorical, sophistic, and poetic. With al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, the

original, descriptive classification of logic, which he inherited from

the neo-Aristotelian tradition, is transformed into epistemological

fact: these are the five types of syllogisms inwhich the humanmind

thinks.41 This epistemological division is then synthesizedwith psychology,

in which these modes of thinking are associated with the

rational and imaginative faculties of the soul. Finally, this epistemology

is transformed into an ontological classification: the objects

of these modes of thought conform to the hierarchy of beings.

Logic is the sole methodology underpinning the divisions of the

sciences, and the demonstrative syllogism(*qiya¯ s burha¯nı¯*) is the sole

means for arriving at “perfect assent,” or complete certitude. The

remaining classes of syllogism serve either to train the mind for

demonstration or to provide the means to protect against error, in

one’s own thought processes as well as others’. This valorization

of demonstration raises another interesting question: while perfect

philosophers are capable of attaining the truth through demonstrative

proof, what about the remainder of people, who are either incapable

or unwilling to tread the path to happiness? Here al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı

again “naturalizes” Aristotelian logic in his monotheistic environment.

Philosophers think in demonstrative syllogisms, the premises

of which they receive as “secondary intelligibles” from the Active

Intellect in that process which leads to the human “acquired” intellect,

the ultimate happiness of the human. For others, the role of

prophecy, in both its religious and social function, serves to transform

demonstrative truth into a rhetorical form understandable by

the remainder of people.

It is within this context of the social function of the syllogistic

arts and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s description of the different levels of truth (and

thus being) afforded by the different classes of syllogisms that we

can understand the presentation of what scholars have called his

“political” philosophy. In the most original exposition of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s

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syncretism, found in *Principles of Beings* and the *Principles of the*

*Opinions*, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı follows up his presentation of cosmology and

psychology with a detailed discussion of the different types of society

in which humans live. In his presentation of the various social

formations and their constituent parts, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı presents a gradation

of human society, from the most excellent, in which the harmony

he depicts in his cosmological hierarchy is reflected, to the worst,

in which material chaos has replaced that harmony. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı is

not outlining an independent discipline of “political philosophy” in

these discussions.42 Rather, he is attempting to account for the multiple

realities produced by “correct” or “incorrect” thinking, that is,

the variant worlds as perceived and thus formed by demonstrative,

dialectical, rhetorical, sophistic, or poetic modes of thought. In one

sense, then, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı assesses the apparent variability of the world

of humans by means of an ordered philosophical system. In another

sense, his presentation of these social orders is also commensurately

rhetorical, employed for the sake of those incapable of pursuing philosophy:

demonstrative truths concerning the true order of beings

are here refashioned for the masses. The systematization inherent in

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s philosophy is here masterful: it accounts for human society

within the larger presentation of its cosmology; it sets forth an

educational curriculum by which the divine order al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı saw in

the universe could be replicated; and it articulates that curriculum

of absolute truth in metaphorical terms that could be understood

by those not capable, or not willing, to pursue the rigorous path to

happiness through the development of “correct thinking.”

Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı was perhaps the most systematic of all the early philosophers

writing in Arabic. His genius lies neither in the radical eclecticism

of al-R¯az¯ı nor in the self-proclaimed brilliance of Avicenna,

but it is nonetheless present, in his revitalization of the numerous

trends of thought that preceded him, in his conscious systematization

of those disparate elements into a philosophically consistent

whole, and above all, in his thoughtful but insistent articulation of

the path to human happiness:

Man is a part of the world, and if we wish to understand his aimand activity

and use and place, then we must first know the purpose of the whole world,

so that it will become clear to us what man’s aim is, as well as the fact

that man is necessarily a part of the world, in that his aim is necessary for

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realizing the ultimate purpose of the whole world. Therefore, if we wish to

know the object toward which we should strive, we must know the aim of

man and the human perfection on account of which we should strive.43

notes

1 The brief biographical treatment presented here, eschewing repetition

of the literary legends associatedwith al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, follows D. Gutas, “Biography,”

in Yarshater [78], 208–13.

2 Ibid., 210b.

3 Ibid., 212b.

4 For English translations of the works of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı see A. Hyman, “The

Letter Concerning the Intellect,” inA. Hyman and James J.Walsh (eds.),

*Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Indianapolis: 1973), 215–21; M. Mahdi,

*Alfarabi’s Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (Ithaca, N.Y.: 1969); F.

Najjar, “Alfarabi: The Political Regime,” in Lerner and Mahdi [189],

31–57; Walzer [77]; Zimmermann [79]. For translations of some of his

short logical works, see below, n. 32.

5 I adapt here P. Moraux’s term “vorphilosophische Sittlichkeit” as discussed

in Gutas [76].

6 Gutas [76], 115–16.

7 I have modified the translation by Dimitri Gutas in Gutas [57].

8 Thus, what follows is a summary of his *Principles of Beings* (*al-Siya¯ sa almadaniyya*

*al-mulaqqab bi-maba¯di‘ al-mawju¯ da¯ t*, ed. F.Najjar [Beirut:

1964]), unless otherwise noted.

9 The presence of an emanationist system in al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s thought has generated

some scholarly contention among earlier generations of interpreters

of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı; see the corrective analysis in Druart [74], Druart

[75], andT.-A.Druart, “Metaphysics,” inYarshater [78], 216–19. I amnot

entirely convinced byDruart’s own explanation (conceived as a question

of loyalty or disloyalty to Aristotelianism) for the presence or absence

of emanationism in one or another of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s works. A distinction

in al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s works between those wemight call “curricular,” designed

to present a historical overview of philosophy to students, and those

in which he develops his own synthesis of earlier trends of thought,

appears to me to be a more fruitful avenue of investigation. Druart’s

consideration of chronology in the above works, however, does appear

equally reasonable.

10 See the account in Davidson [208], 45ff.

11 See Druart’s articles in n. 9 above.

12 See the remarks in Walzer [77], notes to part III, 3.

13 Translation from Walzer [77], 67, with modifications and italics.

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14 Ibid., 58–61, with modifications and italics.

15 On this topic, see Druart [73].

16 The level of functional complexity, situated within a Galenic anatomy,

can increase, depending on al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s presentation in a given work; see

Alon [72], vol. II, under “Faculty,” for other treatments.

17 Hence, the use of the neologism “to intellect” here and in most writings

on the theory of the intellect in Arabic philosophy rather than,

for example, “to understand intellectually,” which does not capture the

connotations of the Arabic.

18 I base the following account of human intellection on Davidson [208],

ch. 3.

19 *Principles of Beings*, 32. Scholars have devoted some attention to what

precisely this means in relation to the question of human immortality

and, above all, whether or not al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı endorsed the notion of conjunction

between the Active Intellect and the human intellect. The issue

is raised in relation to later philosophers’ record of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s views

(especially those of Ibn B¯ajja and Averroes). See S. Pines, “The Limitations

of Human Knowledge according to al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides,”

reprinted in *The CollectedWorks of Shlomo Pines*, vol. V, ed.

W. Z. Harvey andM. Idel (Jerusalem: 1997), 404–31; and Davidson [208],

70–3.

20 For the background of this development in the commentaries on

Aristotle’s *De Anima*, see Davidson [208], ch. 2. A recent study has

gone so far as to claim that al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı did not even read Aristotle’s *De*

*Anima*, and took (or developed) his theory of the intellect from the commentary

tradition alone: M. Geoffrey, “La tradition arabe du *Peri nou*

d’Alexandre d’Aphrodise et les origines de la th’eorie farabienne des quatre

degr ’es de l’intellect,” in *Aristotele e Alessandro di Afrodisia nella*

*tradizione araba*, ed. C. D’Ancona andG. Serra (Padova: 2002), 191–231.

21 *Principles of Beings*, 35–6.

22 Elsewhere al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı uses the metaphor of the seal and the wax; see

Hyman, “Letter Concerning the Intellect,” 215.

23 “Primary intelligibles” are indemonstrable, as can be seen from the

examples above; “secondary intelligibles” are based on sense data but

stripped of their material aspects.

24 *De Anima*, 430a20. See Davidson [208], 19, who further notes that this

does not mean that the intellect is thereby affected or altered as a result.

25 “Philosophy of Aristotle,” in Mahdi, *Alfarabi’s Philosophy of Plato and*

*Aristotle*, 76.

26 I include al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s *Directing Attention to the Way to Happiness* here.

27 Najjar, “Alfarabi: The Political Regime,” 35.

28 Ibid., 35–6; modified.

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29 For the various terms al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı uses for this faculty, see Alon [72],

vol. II, 604f.

30 Alon [72], vol. II, 606.

31 It has also been noted that al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s valorization of logic as the instrument

of philosophy represents an important development in the history

of the study of Aristotelian logic, since previously, in the educational

curriculum of Alexandria, logic was closely related to medicine. See

Gutas [57], 174.

32 Many of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s short introductory works on logic have been translated

by D. M. Dunlop: “Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s Introductory Sections on Logic,”

*Islamic Quarterly* 2 (1955), 264–82; “Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s *Eisagoge*,” *Islamic*

*Quarterly* 3 (1956), 117–38; “Al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯’s Introductory*Risa¯ lah* on Logic,”

*Islamic Quarterly* 3 (1956), 224–35; “Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s Paraphrase of the Categories

of Aristotle,” *Islamic Quarterly* 4–5 (1957), 168–97, 21–54.

Fritz Zimmermann has translated al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s texts on Aristotle’s *De*

*Interpretatione*, in Zimmermann [79].

33 My account of the broad contours of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s logic follows Deborah

Black, “Logic,” in Yarshater [78], 213–16.

34 He followed, for instance, Paul the Persian (see Gutas [56], 248) and

Sergius of Resh‘ayn¯a; see H. G‥atje, “Die Gliederung der sprachlichen

Zeichen nach al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı,” *Der Islam* 47 (1971), 1–24. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s treatment

and its place in intellectual history is a widely debated topic; P. E.

Eskenasy, “Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s Classification of the Parts of Speech,” *Jerusalem*

*Studies in Arabic and Islam* 11 (1988), 55–82, summarizes the different

views nicely.

35 For a summary of this debate and its relation to al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s works, with

multiple references, see Street [182], 22ff.

36 *Introductory Treatise on Logic*, translation from Street [182], 23.

37 See Lameer [175].

38 On these terms (derivative of Aristotle, *De Anima*, III.6), see H. A.Wolfson,

“The Terms *Tas.awwur* and *Tas.d¯ıq* in Arabic Philosophy and their

Greek, Latin and Hebrew Equivalents,” *The Moslem World* 33 (1943),

114–28, and “The Internal Senses in Latin, Arabic and Hebrew Philosophic

Texts,” *Harvard Theological Review* 28 (1935), 69–133.

39 See Black’s remarks at Yarshater [78], 214–15.

40 Street [182], 23–4.

41 Gutas [56], 257.

42 For a clear presentation of the history of errors concerning al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s

so-called “political philosophy,” see D. Gutas, “The Study of ArabicPhilosophy

in the Twentieth Century,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern*

*Studies* 29 (2002), 5–25, esp. 19–25.

43 *Philosophy of Aristotle*, ed. M. Mahdi (Beirut: 1961), 68–9.

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5 The Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs

The Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı attitude toward philosophy and the philosophers was

decidedly ambiguous. They tried consistently to deny that philosophers,

in particular the ancient Greeks, possess an authority in any

way superior to that of the legislating prophets of their own tradition.

Despite an admirable skill with, and even mastery of, mathematics,

physics, and logic, the practitioners of philosophy, in their view, had

achieved almost nothing that they had not taken from a prophetic

source. Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı rejection of philosophy, however, covered less the

content of that philosophy than the contributions claimed for individual

thinkers. For the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs, the philosophers, on their own,

were capable of little except personal speculations that yielded them

mere opinions – often mutually contradictory ones at that. Anything

that was true in philosophy depended in the end on the sure guidance

of divinely inspired prophets; without it the work of philosophers,

no matter how brilliant and profound, produced a result ultimately

lacking validity and real value.

Nevertheless, Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı thought in its formative period would be

simply unintelligible without philosophy, most especially Neoplatonism,

which so permeates the works of the main figures that what

they said is incomprehensible otherwise than by reference to a classical

Greek background. These writers had clearly imported and used

various elements of philosophy, not merely in vague generalities,

but in specific terms and a technical language that derived more or

less directly from translations of ancient texts. Although the works

they wrote to explain their Ism¯a‘¯ılism were not as a whole strictly

speaking philosophical, many portions of them are in reality small

treatises of philosophy.

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In addition, the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs maintained the absolute primacy of intellect

within the created realm, a position rare in Islam outside of the

mainstream philosophers. For them the first created being is intellect

and it is the sum and essence of all subsequent being; it governs and

rules the universe. Revelation is not, and cannot be, in conflict with

universal reason. Religious law does not constitute a separate source

of truth, but rather is a manifestation of reason. The two are, in a

sense, identical. The role of the legislating prophet – the lawgiver –

is to fashion an incarnation of intellect suitable for the physical

world. Sacred law is intellect incarnate. The lawgiver converts what

is theoretical into a practical instrument for the control and then

amelioration of human society, moving it thereby to its collective

salvation. Scripture therefore signifies intellect and is subservient

to it.

This understanding of intellect and its role is most certainly philosophical

and it reveals clearly an influence of the Greek legacy.

Therefore the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs who explored the details and the ramifications

of doctrines that flow from this premise are philosophers even

if they refuse to accept that name for themselves. They might insist

that their teachings have a prophetic origin in some distant past but

the particulars of their arguments – their form and language – owe

more to the history of philosophy and to its reception in the Islamic

world.

the historical context

The Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs are a branch of the Sh¯ı‘a.1 Their existence as a separate

movement began in deep obscurity about the middle of the

ninth century. The technical term for such a movement is *da‘wa*,

an appeal on behalf of a special cause or in favor of a specific line of

im¯ams. For its first half-century only a few names of its agents – in

Arabic called *da¯ ‘ı¯*s – are known. A *da¯ ‘ı¯* is a summoner, a missionary

for converts, and a preacher of doctrine. By the start of the tenth

century matters become much clearer. Yet even so, doctrines other

than those concerning the im¯amate remain uncertain. The movement

had by then also split into factions, one supporting the leader

who would shortly become the first caliph of the F¯at.imid dynasty

(ruled from 909 to 1171), and the other a group of dissenters who

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refused to acknowledge the im¯amate of these same caliphs. The latter

group, who existed for the most part exclusively in the eastern

Islamic lands, were known as the Qarmatians.

Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs then, like the rest of the Sh¯ı‘a, all drew on a common

fund of doctrine that had been assembled and propagated by several

generations of Sh¯ı‘ite scholars and authorities, particularly but

not solely previous im¯ams. Strictly among the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs, interesting

early evidence for the study of philosophy by key members of the

*da‘wa* appears in a memoir by Abu¯ ‘Abdalla¯h Ibn al-Haytham.2 This

North African writer was Sh¯ı‘¯ı prior to the advent of the F¯at.imids

and, once they had achieved victory, he quickly joined their cause.

His account reveals important details of his own background, which

included a fairly complete education in Greek philosophy. He says

that he owned and had read the works of both Plato and Aristotle,

for example.3 His conversations with the *da¯ ‘ı¯*s in charge of the new

government show, as well, that both he and at least one of them

had read a range of philosophical works and that they could discuss,

at will, specifics of Aristotelian logic and other Aristotelian

doctrines.4 Ibn al-Haytham became a *da¯ ‘ı¯* himself. The other *da¯ ‘ı¯*

was the brother of the mastermind of the F¯at.imid triumph in North

Africa; he had worked for the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı *da‘wa* for close to twenty

years.

At the same time or slightly later, in the east, in Khur¯as¯an and

in north-central Iran, another set of writers began to explain Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı

doctrine in a philosophical manner.5 They converted an older Sh¯ı‘ite

cosmology by reinterpreting it Neoplatonically. As a prime example,

cosmic figures in the older Islamic myth became universal intellect

and universal soul in the newer version. The one *da¯ ‘ı¯* most responsible

for this development was Muh.ammad al-Nasaf¯ı (d. 943), who

was active in Khur¯as¯an.

Unfortunately, al-Nasaf¯ı’s major work, *The Result* (*al-Mah.*

*s.*

*u¯ l*),

has not survived, leaving any reconstruction of the beginnings of

Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı philosophy hampered by its absence. Still, some passages

from it occur in later works. It also soon became the subject of controversy

within the eastern *da‘wa*. A contemporary, Abu¯ H. a¯ tim al-

Ra¯zı¯ (d. 934), a *da¯ ‘ı¯* operating in the area of Rayy, felt called upon to

write a detailed “correction” of it. That work, the *Is.*

*l ¯ ah.*

– at least a

major portion of it – is available.6 Thus, there is sufficient material

to construct a general picture of the contributions of al-Nasaf¯ı, albeit

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often by extrapolating what he might have said from the refutation

by his opponents.

Al-Nasaf¯ı was, moreover, not alone in Khur¯as¯an. His predecessors

and successors wrote treatises containing philosophical doctrine. An

important disciple, a *da¯ ‘ı¯* known only as Abu¯ Tamma¯m, composed

a work called *Kita¯b al-shajara* that has been preserved in several

versions. Falsely ascribed to someone else, its second half was published

under the title *Kit ¯ ab al-¯ıd. ¯ ah.*

.7 One other member of this same

Khura¯ sa¯nı¯ school is Abu¯ Ya‘qu¯ b al-Sijista¯nı¯, who was to become,

in the next generation, the most important advocate of Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı

Neoplatonism.

Abu¯ H. a¯ tim is famous for another of his works, the *Distinction*

*of Prophecy* (*A‘la¯m al-nubuwwa*), which is his account of a debate

he held with the renowned physician-philosopher Abu¯ Bakr al-Ra¯zı¯,

a fellow townsman.8 Abu¯ Bakr had boldly argued that the prophets

have had no advantage over the great philosophers and that in fact

their so-called revelation is generally incoherent and of little value.

He was the champion of philosophy exclusively, and was thus uninterested

in the reconciliation of scripture and reason. Abu¯ H. a¯ tim,

like many other Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı writers, was deeply offended by this man

and what he stood for. His record of this debate is, nonetheless, a

major source for our knowledge of Abu¯ Bakr’s thought.

The development of Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı philosophy was thus ongoing, with

considerable internal disagreement and agitation. Moreover, these

Iranian writers were not supporters of the F¯at.imids, at least not initially.

However, the F¯at.imids eventually adopted a conciliatory attitude

to the eastern Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs and, in the second half of the tenth

century, began to accept their works, though often in an edited or

abridged version. Al-Sijist ¯an¯ı finally recognized the leadership of the

F¯at.imids and, as appears quite likely, revised his own older treatises

appropriately. By the end of the century the major eastern

philosophers, among them al-Nasafı¯, al-Ra¯zı¯, Abu¯ Tamma¯m, and al-

Sijist ¯an¯ı, were a fully honored part of the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı heritage. They,

but most especially al-Sijist ¯an¯ı, were the authorities of record; their

statements of Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı doctrine defined its main tenets.

It is especially important here to understand the real nature of

their philosophical sources. Given the fragmentary condition of the

earliest evidence, however, and the generally poor state of editions of

nearly all Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı works from the period, that investigation remains

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quite tentative.9 But it is clear that the writers just mentioned had

access to a number of Neoplatonic texts, in addition to other Greek

classics in translation.10 They knew such treatises as the so-called

*Theology of Aristotle* along with the other material derived from

Plotinus’ *Enneads*. Some version of the *Liber de Causis* and the other

Arabic versions of Proclus11 had likely reached them as well. In these

cases, however, the connection is not (at least not thus far) textually

explicit but rather implicit in the use of shared language and technical

terms and concepts.

For two other crucially important pseudo-epigraphic texts the link

is, by contrast, more obvious. One is now known as the *Pseudo-*

*Ammonius*, a collection of opinions, in the main Neoplatonic, said

to have been advocated by various ancient Greek philosophers on

several topics such as creation *ex nihilo* and the identification of

God with being.12 Traces of this work show up in Arabic discussions

of the history of Greek thought. It is quoted in passages from al-

Nasafı¯ and Abu¯ Tamma¯m and is certainly the source for Abu¯ H. a¯ tim

al-R¯az¯ı’s chapters that purport to prove the failure of the philosophers

to attain the truth on their own. Lacking the sure guidance of

the divinely inspired prophets, says Abu¯ H. a¯ tim, they flounder about

in error, each asserting an opinion and nothing more. There is therefore

little doubt that Abu¯ H. a¯ tim used this work and that it served

as a basis for Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı knowledge of Neoplatonic doctrine. The one

manuscript of it available now,13 moreover, begins with a statement

to the same effect. The Arabic work that we have now may thus

have been a product of the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı *da‘wa*, perhaps a collection of

notes taken by a *da¯ ‘ı¯* (such as Abu¯ H. a¯ tim or al-Nasafı¯) from one or

more translations of an ancient author (one possibility would be the

Ammonius mentioned near the beginning of it). For the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs its

primary purpose was to invalidate the work of philosophers, and it

is therefore less a source in itself than evidence of other sources of

theirs.

The other text is equally problematic. In the *Longer Version of*

*the Theology of Aristotle*, which incorporates all of the shorter version,

but adds many passages that appear in it alone, there are sections,

mostly quite brief, that match portions of some Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı works

in both wording and in doctrine.14 The additions in question do

not go back to Plotinus. The doctrines expressed in them are, or

rather become, however, characteristic of the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs in the F¯at.imid

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period. Yet they surely also come from an older, possibly ancient,

source and are not in themselves a product of Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı interests.

Because so much of his writing survives, al-Sijist ¯an¯ı, who died

not long after 971, is for us the major representative of the earliest

Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı philosophy. Until the beginning of the eleventh century, the

*da‘wa* produced no other important figures, unless it is appropriate

to place in this interval the Brethren of Purity (Ikhw¯an al-S. af ¯a’) and

to accept them as being somehow Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı. Their famous encyclopedia,

the *Epistles* (*Rasa¯ ’il*), displays certain affinities with Isma¯ ‘ı¯lı¯

Neoplatonic doctrine and it is commonly supposed that this secretive

society was connected to the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı movement. There is, however,

dispute about both the dates of their activities and their affiliation.

The best evidence places them about this time and various

statements in their *Epistles* closely match certain doctrines of the

Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs. However, what they advocate in regard to the im¯amate does

not; they cannot have been supporters of the F¯at.imids. Instead they

represent vaguely on this one issue the position of the Qarmatians.15

Strictly within the F¯at.imid context the next great authority

chronologically isH. am¯ıd al-D¯ın al-Kirm¯an¯ı, a towering figure whose

writings dominate the era of the caliph al-H. ¯akim(reigned 996–1021).

As is typical for all of these Isma¯ ‘ı¯lı¯ *da¯ ‘ı¯*s, there exists little information

about al-Kirm¯an¯ı’s life, except that he lived and worked in Iraq

and visited Cairo. He dedicated all of his writings to al-H. ¯akim, the

last of them in the year 1021 when this ruler disappeared.16

Al-Kirm¯an¯ı belonged to a philosophical tradition different from

the others; themajor influence on himis not the Neoplatonism of the

*Theology* and related texts, but al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı. Accordingly, al-Kirm¯an¯ı’s

own approach is much more Aristotelian. For example, he adopted a

version of the scheme of multiple intellects that correspond each in

turn to the heavenly spheres – a doctrine favored by his contemporary

Avicenna, as well. He speaks of the active intellect and not the

universal intellect; he has little or no real notion of a universal or

world soul. Needless to say, his views on many issues were in conflict

with those of al-Sijist ¯an¯ı and the other earlier figures. In fact

he wrote an important treatise precisely to analyze and then recast

previous Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı doctrine in a mode more in tunewith his own. That

work, the *Riy ¯ ad.*

,17 attempts to reconcile the positions espoused by,

first, Abu¯ H. a¯ tim al-Ra¯zı¯ in his critique of al-Nasafı¯ and, second,

those of al-Sijist ¯an¯ı, who had tried to come to the aid of al-Nasaf¯ı.

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The points of contention are largely philosophical: for example, is

universal soul perfect from its inception or does it need to acquire

perfection in the course of time? Inadvertently, al-Kirm¯an¯ı provides,

in this instance, a rare internal view of the development of Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı

philosophical doctrine.

Al-Kirm¯an¯ı’s attempt to readjust the course of Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı thought

failed in the short run. Nevertheless, his work constitutes one of the

high points of Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı philosophical interest. Subsequent F¯at.imid

era authorities ignored him and preferred instead the doctrines of al-

Sijist ¯an¯ı. The two prime examples are N¯as.ir-i Khusraw (d. ca. 1077)

and al-Mu’ayyad fı¯ al-Dı¯n al-Shı¯ra¯zı¯, the former a *da¯ ‘ı¯* who wrote

exclusively in Persian but who often seems to be translating passages

from al-Sijist ¯an¯ı, and the latter the head of the *da‘wa* from 1058 to

1077, whose massive output of sermons and doctrinal lessons has

yet to be studied in detail.

With the end of the F¯at.imid dynasty in 1171, the main center of

Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı activity moved either to Alamut in northern Iran or to the

Yemen. The T.

ayyib¯ı *da‘wa* in the Yemen maintained throughout

the later medieval period a vigorous scholarly tradition of collecting,

studying, and writing. The survival of nearly all earlier Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı texts

depended on the T.

ayyib¯ıs; and scholars in this *da‘wa* continued to

produce new works that build on the older philosophical doctrines.

In them the *Epistles* of the Brethren of Purity assume an important

place, as do the writings of al-Kirm¯an¯ı, who was much favored by

the later Yemenis.

the philosophical doctrines of the

major figures

*Muh. ammad al-Nasaf¯ı*

A major concern of al-Nasaf¯ı18 was to define the transcendence of

God in such a way that he, the Originator, stands totally outside his

creation. To do so al-Nasaf¯ı relied on a special vocabulary, which

he shared with others of his time. The verb *abda‘a* (to originate)

yields the active participle *Mubdi‘*, God as Originator, who brings

into being both thing (*al-shay‘*) and not-thing (*al-la¯ -shay‘*). He originates

from nothing (*la¯ min shay‘*); beforehand he is and there is

nothing else, no knowledge or form. All knowledge and forms are

originated; they cannot be other than originated being; and they are

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not in God’s being (*huwiyya*) in any sense. Non-being and nothingness,

like being, follow being; they are negations of an existent.

God’s command (*amr*), which is also called the word (*kalima*) and

is the very originating itself, causes originated being, which is intellect.

The command thus serves as an intermediary between him

and first originated being – that is, between God and intellect. But,

although the act of the agent here is prior ontologically to its effect,

from the perspective of the effect, the action is the effect. The command

is intellect. This notion appears to derive from a passage in

the *Pseudo-Ammonius* that states that the agent (*mu’aththir*) produces

an effect (*athar*) that becomes the patient (*mu’aththar*). Thus

the command of God, which is this effect, has no separate identity

other than the being it brings into being.

Originated being (the *mubda‘*) is intellect. The Creator has given

existence to the universe all at once by the origination of intellect

as a whole and by seeding in it the forms of the world. Intellect like

its cause is eternal; in intellect the forms are also eternal. If this

were not so, they would not endure and there would be no possibility

of reverting to this eternity. If intellect were not perfect and

eternal, the order in the world would cease and it would perish. Intellect

in turn emanates the forms to what follows after and below it.

Intellect becomes thus the intermediary between its own cause and

the world. Its immediate effect is soul, which, unlike intellect, is

not perfect. Soul requires the benefit of intellect in order to acquire

perfection in the future. One result is time. In its search for these

benefits, soul produces motion; in finding them it rests. These two

tendencies result from soul’s relationshipwith intellect; they in turn

generate prime matter and specific form, which together provide the

foundation of the compound, material world.

Mankind, the first thing formed in the soul, is the fruit of soul’s

endeavor to master intellect. Knowledge was hidden in the rational

human soul, which is a part of universal soul, in the same way a

tree is concealed in its seed. Just as the seed cannot develop without

water, likewise this knowledge in the human – its rationality – will

not sprout or grow without the water of prophecy.

*Abu¯ H. a¯ tim al-Ra¯ zı¯*

Like his contemporary, Abu¯ H. a¯ tim gave great importance to terms

based on *abda‘a*: God is the *Mubdi‘*, the Originator. He originates all

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existing being at once; the first of them is the sum of existing being(s).

Also, aswith al-Nasafı¯, the originating (*ibda¯ ‘*) isGod’s command and

his word. Once originated, it and all aspects of it are one and the same

being; they are first intellect. Hence no aspect or attribute of the

originating or what it creates applies in any way to the Originator;

he cannot be described with any termthat pertains to created beings.

To this point Abu¯ H. a¯ tim’s doctrine of God and creation is much

like that of al-Nasaf¯ı, or for that matter al-Sijist ¯an¯ı, or even the

*Longer Theology*.His concept of time, however, is new. In his system

time and intellect are one being. Since there is no time prior to origination

and since origination and intellect are the same being, time

and intellect, he argues, are the same. Soul proceeds from intellect

(he uses the verb *inba‘atha*); intellect then bestows beingness in its

entirety on soul. Soul receives all and also time. Although its reality

requires time, soul is nevertheless perfect. For Abu¯ H. a¯ timits discursive

mode of being is not a defect, nor is its subservience to intellect.

The two are together in a higher, spiritually pure realm, uncontaminated

by any portion of, or contact with, the physical heavens or the

mundane world. They are alike in the sense that male and female are

both one species even though one is above the other. Intellect and

soul are both of the highest rank and nobility; there is no nobility

higher. As the foundation of the higher, spiritual world, they are the

source of perfect nobility, light, mercy, knowledge, the ultimate in

all ways, containing no darkness or murkiness at all.

The foundation of the lower world is prime matter and form,

whose temporal mode of being is not connected to that higher world.

Nonetheless, an effect (*athar*) of that lofty world does govern this

one, like the effect of a craftsman on his product. The kinds of soul

are vegetative, animal, rational, and, only in man, a fourth that is

not of this world but is an effect of that other higher world. Thus

human soul is not a part of universal soul, nor does it participate in

that soul. Nothing of this world is directly connected to the world

of intellect and soul. However, humans, for the sake of whom the

mundane world exists, accept the effect of the higher realm. And

man is the fruit of this world. The world and all that is in it was

originated for his sake. It reaches completion and its end is when

man is complete. At that point the world will disappear.

Despite some differences, both al-Nasafı¯ and Abu¯ H. a¯ tim offered

a fairly clear Neoplatonic interpretation of the issues just outlined.

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Unfortunately, beyond this brief sketch, the evidence for the full

range of either man’s doctrines is at present missing. What we know

about what they said is tantalizing, but it remains only that.

*Abu¯ Ya‘qu¯ b al-Sijista¯nı¯*

Whereas the material for al-Nasaf¯ı and al-R¯az¯ı is slight and any picture

of their ideas must, by the nature of the evidence, remain superficial,

for al-Sijist ¯an¯ı19 it is relatively abundant.20 It is true, nonetheless,

that even he never composed a complete work of philosophy.

Instead there are individual chapters and sections in his works –

many in fact – that are by themselves treatises of philosophy. Frequently,

within a single composition, he provides a discussion of a

philosophical issue in one chapter followed by another on a topic

that can only be classed as Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı doctrine.21

Al-Sijist ¯an¯ı’s philosophical teachings range over a descending and

ascending scheme – from the simple and universal to the complex

and particular, from the one to the many, and back again. For him

the study of creation reveals the structure of the universe: the perpetual

stability of the higher and the constant flux of the lower worlds.

Human soul is entangled in the latter; its salvation and eventual

eternity resides in the former. Creation proceeds from God to the

foremost among created beings, the intellect, which is the first to

have existence and is nearest to God himself. Next is soul, followed

by nature, the latter in reality only a lower formof soul. After nature

there is a shift from the sublime and spiritual to the mundane and

corporeal. Nature generates the physical world, the earthly habitat

of plants, animals, and above all of humans. For al-Sijist ¯an¯ı, as for

the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs in general, the upward return is of even greater concern.

They see it as a historical process, the collective salvation of

mankind. A second hierarchy, parallel to intellect, soul, and nature,

provides the law and the truth that lead humans away from this

world into the next, from the physical and sensate to the sublime

and spiritual, in reverse back to pure intellect.

In al-Sijist ¯an¯ı’s statements about this process there are several

doctrines that are characteristic of him. His doctrine of the One is

primarily concerned to preserve its absolute unqualified transcendence.

God is not the first in any sense; he is not the outer limit.

For al-Sijist ¯an¯ı God is not a substance; he is not intellect, he has no

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being, he is not a cause, he has no that-ness (*inniyya*). All such attributions

are false in his case. Al-Sijist ¯an¯ı devoted separate chapters in

his works to refute carefully those who hold to any of these propositions.

Among his opponents are both the philosophers and the vast

majority of Islamic theologians. He comments that the philosophers

claim that God is a substance that is somehow related to something

else. But one cannot say, for example, that God is a thing

not like other things. Al-Sijist ¯an¯ı’s point is that denying all physical

attributes of God is but one step toward distinguishing him from all

created being. Attempting to understand God by intellectual means,

even approximations, is also, despite its abstract theoretical form,

a kind of anthropomorphism. The intellect, human or otherwise,

simply cannot know God.

Most Neoplatonists assume that the intellect’s role is, in part, to

contemplate the One and to realize some apprehension of it (possibly

to attempt a unionwith it). But these Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı philosophers insist that

intellect is incapable of attaining this goal. To express his doctrine

al-Sijist ¯an¯ı advocated the use of a double negation, a kind of *via*

*negativa duplex*. One must say that God is not a thing, not limited,

not describable, not in a place, not in time, and so on; but then add to

these negations a second set. Thus one also states that God is *not* not

a thing, *not* not limited, *not* not describable, *not* not in a place, *not*

not in time. He aims to remove God from intelligibility altogether.

Simple negation is an understandable act that yields an intellectual

result; double negation is not.

Yet curiously al-Sijist ¯an¯ı next insists that creation, or more precisely

“origination” – he also uses the Arabic verb (*abda‘a*) – occurs

in response to the “will” of God. God thus “commands” that the universe

exist. His concern here to preserve the act of God’s originating

the world from any comparison with other types of agency is not

surprising. In relying exclusively on the term “originate” (*abda‘a*)

for God’s creating something from nothing, he joins both his predecessors

in the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı *da‘wa* and others such as Isaac Israeli and

al-Kind¯ı. He is careful to call all other creating by another name. Soul,

for example, gushes (*inbajasa*) or proceeds (*inba‘atha*) from intellect.

Emanation is not the same as origination. But even so he stands out

in his attempt to insert an intermediary between God and intellect

and to label it in such a way as to emphasize both its distinctness

and its connotation of will and purpose. It is also the word, the *logos*

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(*al-kalima*). Yet its real status is that of a nonexistent and, once the

command is issued by God, that very command thereafter is intellect

and nothing more. Once the world has come into being, the order

that gave it existence is an aspect of intellect itself. Moreover, there

cannot andwill not be another command; the first is eternal and outside

of time and sequence. God’s origination determined that there

should be cosmos rather than chaos. If God exists the cosmos can

never be chaos.

The object of the command is, in the first instance, intellect,

which is the sum and principle of all being, the formof all things, both

manifest and hidden. It is the wellspring of all spiritual and physical

light. Al-Sijist ¯an¯ı also employs the peculiarly Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı term, “the preceder”

(*al-sa¯biq*), to indicate that intellect precedes all other beings.

Yet some aspect of intellect enters all subsequent being as well. Soul

gushes from it when intellect turns upon itself in contemplation;

soul in turn engenders nature within itself. Whereas intellect is perfect,

soul is not. Rather it needs the benefit of intellect to attain a

degree of that possible perfection. Soul is in motion, intellect at rest.

As soul moves it creates time. However, insofar as soul is unmindful

of its own mentor, it sinks, often becoming enthralled with the natural

world it has made within itself. It must be reminded of its origin;

its forgetfulness requires a revelation that corrects its orientation,

turning its attention upward again rather than downward.

Most aspects of al-Sijist ¯an¯ı’s doctrine of intellect and soul follow

Neoplatonic precedent. Significantly, he resolutely maintains the

indivisibility of both. For him there are no separate intellects, such

as, for example, show up on the planetary scheme of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and

Avicenna. His intellect is universal and individual human mind participates

in it. Likewise the soul is universal and our souls are a part

of that universal.

A key problem is prophecy. Prophecy is not philosophy and

philosophers are not prophets. In fact the major lawgiving prophets

all belong to the same lineage. They share a similar extraordinary

faculty that is not available to other humans. But, at the same time,

they are, as al-Sijist ¯an¯ı puts it, men who are “the deputies of intellect

in the physical world.” Based on their perfect access to the realm of

intellect, their role is to convert reason into language and to convey

it to other humans. This function requires that such prophets

have unrestricted and unencumbered benefit of intellect, that their

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physical selves be so harmoniously undisturbed by worldly desire

or bodily interference that they can, at will, take what they find in

intellect and bring it back down to earth, so to speak. In so doing they

formulate laws and compose Scripture; the product of this effort is

an incarnation of intellect.

In order to govern the world of flux and constant change, the timeless

reality of what is truly real must inspire a representative who acts

here. The task is to warn the soul away from the terrestrial realm and

to teach it, as it exists in the collective souls of individual humans,

how to return to its higher self. For the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs Muh.ammad was the

final legislator; his is the ultimate law. At a future point a messiah

will bring an end to human history. In the meanwhile a sacred line of

im¯ams, descended from Muh. ammad, and thus of the same lineage,

provide guidance; they each preserve the standard of his legislation

by an inherited knowledge of what his words actually signify. They

all have the ability to trace meaning back from the literal exoteric

expression to its abstract esoteric source in the universal timeless

intellect.

*H.*

*amı¯d al-Dı¯n al-Kirma¯nı¯*

Al-Kirm¯an¯ı22 entered the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı *da‘wa* about one full generation

after al-Sijist ¯an¯ı’s death. The earliest date inhiswritings is 1008.23 As

mentioned previously, al-Kirm¯an¯ı adopted a kind of Farabian scheme

to an Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı purpose and in so doing hoped to convince the *da‘wa*

to move in the same direction.

Nevertheless, for al-Kirm¯an¯ı, in contrast to al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, God is not

the first being, First Cause, or necessary being (*wa¯ jib al-wuju¯ d*). The

beginning of a causal series is, despite its primacy in that series,

still a part of that same series. That beginning is intellect – the first

intellect – and not God. God is rather that on which the series itself

depends. He is the very principle of existence but is not an existent

being. God is also not a substance. He is neither corporeal nor

incorporeal; neither potentially something (*bi-al-quwwa*) nor actually

something (*bi-al-fi‘l*); he has no need; nothing is similar to him;

he has no relationship, no contrary, no equal, is not in time and not

subject to time, and he is neither eternity nor subject to eternity.

Al-Kirm¯an¯ı’s point is that God is utterly unknown and unknowable.

As much as the intellectmight want to grasp or to comprehend

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and understand him, it cannot. To try only increases its distance from

him. God can no more be seen by the intellect than the sun by the

naked human eye. He simply cannot be perceived by the methods

of intellect. And languages cannot signify God as he really is, since

the signifier must have a referent that exists and can be known.

God, however, is unknown; one cannot signify with language, or

with abstractions in the mind, something that is unknown. Following

al-Sijist ¯an¯ı, al-Kirm¯an¯ı advocates a process of double negation. A

true declaration of God’s unique oneness, *tawh. ¯ıd*, tolerates no compromise,

even of the most intellectually sophisticated. The proper

procedure then is to deny all physical and mental images that seek

to understand God. None are valid. What this method achieves is the

removal of God from the sphere of human speculation and imagination.

But what of standard, religiously based discourse about God?

Al-Kirm¯an¯ı’s answer is that what humans speak about when they

talk of God is actually the intellect at its highest and ultimate first

level. It is not really God and should never be confused with the true

Lord Creator, but it is as close as humans can come. It suggests God

but is not him.

Creation occurs initially by origination and what came into being

by *ibda¯ ‘* is first intellect, which is, subsequently, the absolute first

of the cosmos: the first being, the First Cause, the first mover. It

is the one, the first cause and effect, the innovation and innovated,

perfection and perfect, eternal and eternity, existent and existence,

all at once. Though one, it thinks, is thought, and is what is thought.

First intellect, i.e., the first being in the cosmic order, is the eternal

unmoved mover. In the Aristotelian model, the unmoved mover is

God, the cause of all causes. Therefore, al-Kirm¯an¯ı’s recognition that

this intellect serves as the God that humans know and understand

confirms the philosophers’ position but with a profound change.

Their God is the first intellect, yet it is not really God but rather

an intellectual image actually quite distinct from the real God. Nevertheless,

this first intellect, although it bears some relationship to

the cosmos that it now causes, is absolutely unique. It is the first

thing among things; the mover of all motions; and it is the actuality

that brings all potentiality into actuality.

There are, in all, five kinds of intellect: a first, a second, and three

types in the human mind – acquiring, potential, and actual. The

first is prior to all others. It is one in essence but multiple in its

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relationships and thus it gives rise to a dual being, the second intellect,

a being of more complexity than the first. The process of going

from the first to the second broadens creation by creating a multiplicity.

The second intellect arises from the first because the first unintentionally

radiates its joy at being itself. It is so pleased and rapturous

with its own being that it blushes, thereby generating an image

that becomes a separate second intellect which is a reflection of

itself. This process is called “procession” or “emanation” (*inba‘atha,*

*inbi‘a¯ th*). The second, in contrast to the first, has a rank and position

merely by being second and thus not alone or unique. It is subject

to procession; it is *inbi‘a¯ thı¯* rather than *ibda¯ ‘ı¯*, although, in so far

as it is intellect pure and simple, it continues to have *ibda¯ ‘ı¯* qualities.

It is actual and not potential; it encompasses and preserves its

own essence like the first. But, unlike its own immediate source, the

second both must and can conceive from what it came; it envisions

the first intellect as well as it contemplates itself, thus producing a

double aspect that gives it its fundamental duality. In its imitation of

intellect as agent, it is what al-Kirm¯an¯ı calls soul – a soul, however,

unrelated to human soul and clearly parallel to the universal soul of

Neoplatonism only in name. The second aspect of second intellect

derives from the first in its capacity as effect. In the second intellect

it constitutes an intellect in potentiality rather than in actuality.

And, in contrast to the higher aspect, it takes on the characteristics

of prime matter, an unrealized potential in which it, with form,

produces bodily being. By itself the *ibda¯ ‘ı¯* aspect of second intellect

preserves its essence as intellect while, in its acquisitive mode,

it is simply form to this material being. As a whole it is potential

life.

From these two aspects of second intellect, there issue a further

procession of intellects and a parallel series of material entities. The

former are the eight additional intellects of the cosmic system and

the latter are the material forms of the spheres, out of which generate

the corporeal beings of the terrestrial world. Al-Kirm¯an¯ı assigns

the intellects of these spheres the role of governing and regulating

the physical world. They are also intimately related to the progress

of religious revelation and the development of sacred law. Each of

these secondary intellects – called the *thawa¯nı¯* by the philosophers,

he notes – observe their own veneration and service to God by their

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perfect unchanging circular motion like pilgrims circumambulating

the Ka‘ba. This perfection is an emulation of or a desire for assimilation

to the first intellect. Arrayed in rank order strictly determined by

how many intellects precede, each must acknowledge and attempt

to comprehend all those before it, and this increasingly complex

requirement burdens the next with an imperfection more serious

than that of its predecessor. As the number increases, the complexity

of the images required to comprehend those previous to each

imposes a certain need and impotence. Relative to human society,

the tenth intellect is the closest and most directly involved in the

governance of terrestrial affairs.

Al-Kirm¯an¯ı’s concept of soul in the individual human makes perfectly

clear that humans do not possess either a soul or intellect

directly comparable to the celestial beings. Human soul does not

have existence prior to the body inwhich and with which it acquires

its being. Such a soul at the beginning is formless and devoid of

knowledge although it is, nevertheless, the first perfection of its natural

body. Intellect in this situation is a rational quality of the soul,

a kind of soul, or an aspect of it. This soul, as a substance, has the

possibility of surviving its body. But, for its knowledge of the world,

neither soul nor its rational faculty can function without depending

on physical sensations. It commences with an instinctual comprehension

of the surrounding world, an instinct it shareswith the other

animals. But it also possesses a possible second perfection, a purely

rational existence in which its substance ceases to be attached to

body. Human souls for the present cannot exist without a body, but

that will not always be the case. On the basis of what it acquires

in the way of knowledge and good deeds, soul is a living substance

with the ability of enduring beyond the dissolution of the material

body.

This soul has three aspects to its single self: growth, sensation,

and rational discrimination. The third category is potentially intellectual.

It develops through seven stages: conception, growth, sensation,

imagination, rationality, intellectuality, and finally a “second

procession” (*munba‘ath tha¯nı¯*), the last stage being its final move

from corporeal existence into an eternal state without body. Even

with a rational faculty, however, it commences without knowing

what is in its best interest. It lacks knowledge like, he says, a blank

sheet of paper and thereafter undergoes a progressive development in

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which it assumes a different form. At the start, from the perspective

of true *ibda¯ ‘ı¯* and *inbi‘a¯ thı¯* beings, it is sick, and its illness is not due

to its body but rather its own imperfection. On its own, it cannot

learn anything that does not strictly depend on information gleaned

from the senses. However, there are intelligent forces that can deal

with these souls and convince them to accede to the regimen that

will bring them knowledge from outside. They must have a teacher.

As with celestial souls, human souls contain, however slight and

weak theymay be, some *ibda¯ ‘ı¯* and *inbi‘a¯ thı¯* qualities. In a way they

resemble distantly the intellect and soul of that higher world, and in

turn that world preserves a remote interest in the souls of this realm.

Accordingly the heavenly members of the hierarchy retain a providential

responsibility for human beings. The tenth and final intellect

of the heavenly world, acting on behalf of the whole system, has the

greatest responsibility. It generates its own intellectual representative

in that lower world, who, in turn, receives the emanations of

all the higher angels – i.e., the separate intellects. This person must

be human but, as al-Kirm¯an¯ı is careful to point out, it also must be

someone who is *truly* human, a person whose human quality is most

perfectly and exclusively intellectual and thus not merely animal.

Only such a person actually resembles the angels in their *inbi‘a¯ thı¯*

and *ibda¯ ‘ı¯* qualities. Such rare and unique individuals are the great

prophets and founders of religions, and above all the messiah of the

future who will, at the end of time, finally represent the actualization

of intellect among humans. For now the im¯am is the perfection

of intellect in any one period; he is the ultimate teacher in this world

because he most completely knows the truth. The prophets were, in

fact, the intellects of their time; they were the earthly image of true

first intellect, which is the Divine in so far as he is an intelligible

being.

The philosophical base of Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı doctrine, especially as propounded

by the figures just discussed, was perfectly obvious to their Islamic

opponents, many of whom explicitly cite such a connection in refuting

it. The *da‘wa* vainly attempted to control access to the writings

of these *da¯ ‘ı¯*s, but prominent authorities knew them nonetheless.

Moreover, despite a stated rejection, many may have been more

influenced by what they learned than theywillingly admit. Avicenna

(d. 1037), for example, confessed that his father and brother were

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Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs and that he was first made aware of their teachings by

his own family.24 The great Sunn¯ı theologian al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı (d. 1111)

commented frequently on the philosophical appeal of the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs.25

The vehemently anti-philosophical critic Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328)

reports that he came upon and had read al-Sijista¯nı¯’s*Maqa¯ lı¯d* among

other works of theirs.26 And, finally, the famous Egyptian, Mamlukera

historian al-Maqr¯ız¯ı (d. 1442) states quite clearly that he had

located genuine books by members of the *da‘wa* and that he derived

his knowledge of Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı doctrines from them. He, too, had no doubt

about the essential role of philosophy in their thought.27

notes

1 The best general account of the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs is Daftary [80]. But see also

W. Madelung, “Ism¯a‘¯ıliyya,” in [16].

2 W. Madelung and P. E. Walker, *The Advent of the F ¯ at.*

*imids: A Contemporary*

*Sh¯ı‘¯ı Witness* (London: 2000).

3 Ibid., 111–12.

4 Ibid., 136–55.

5 The first towork out the details of the life of these Iranian *da¯ ‘ı¯*swas S.M.

Stern inhis “The Early Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıMissionaries in North-West Persia and in

Khurasan and Transoxiana,” *BSOAS* 23 (1960): 56–90, reprinted in Stern

[83], 189–233. Since his pioneering effort some additional information

has come to light. SeeWalker [84], 1–24; and Daftary [80], 120–3, 164–8,

and 234–42.

6 Ed. H. Mı¯nu¯ cheher and M. Mohaghegh (Tehran: 1998).

7 *Kit ¯ ab al-¯ıd. ¯ ah.*

, ed. A. Tamer (Beirut: 1965). For the identity of the real

author, Abu¯ Tamma¯m, see Walker, “Abu¯ Tamma¯m and his *Kita¯b alshajara*:

A New Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı Treatise from Tenth Century Khurasan,” in

*JAOS* 114 (1994): 343–52.

8 Ed.S.

. al-Sawy and G.-R. Aavani (Tehran: 1977).

9 With a few exceptions the works of the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı philosophers remain

either unpublished or printed in editions so unreliable as to make these

investigations hazardous and critical judgment about them extremely

difficult.

10 For a general assessment of the sources of Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı thought in this regard,

see Walker [84], ch. 2.

11 On these texts see chapter 2 above, D’Ancona [51], and Endress [53].

12 See the edition and study by U. Rudolph in his *Die Doxographie des*

*Pseudo-Ammonios: Ein Beitrag zur neuplatonischen U¨ berlieferung im*

*Islam* (Stuttgart: 1989).

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13 Istanbul, Aya Sofya 2450.

14 The comments offered here and in Walker [84] about the *Longer Theology*

depend on an as yet unpublished preliminary edition of the text

by Paul Fenton (shared privately by him). For a description see his “The

Arabic and Hebrew Versions of the *Theology of Aristotle*,” in Kraye,

Ryan, and Schmitt [60], 241–64.

15 On the Ikhw¯an al-S. af ¯a’, for whom there is a substantial bibliography,

see especially Netton [82]. Although this edition is otherwise all but

identical with the older edition, see Netton’s recommendations for the

most important of recent studies, xii–xiii.

16 On al-Kirm¯an¯ı’s life and works, see Walker [87].

17 Printed in an unreliable edition by ‘¯A. T¯amir (Beirut: 1960).

18 The summary of the philosophical doctrine that follows here draws

upon and to a certain extent depends on Walker [84], ch. 3.

19 The summary that follows is based, in the main, on Walker [84], part II

(67–142). On al-Sijist ¯an¯ı see also Walker [85] and Walker [86].

20 The most important writings of al-Sijista¯nı¯ are the following: *Ithba¯ t alnub*

*¯ uwa* (or *al-nub ¯ uw¯ at*) (*Prophecy’s Proof*), ed. ‘¯A. T¯amir (Beirut: 1966);

*Kashf al-mah.*

*ju¯ b* (*Revealing the Concealed*), ed. H. Corbin (Tehran:

1949), French trans. by H. Corbin: *Le d´evoilement des choses cach´ees*

(Paris: 1988); *Kita¯b al-iftikha¯ r* (*The Boast*), ed. I. Poonawala (Beirut:

2000); *Kita¯b al-maqa¯ lı¯d* (*The Keys*), MS. Hamda¯nı¯ Library; *Kita¯b alyana*

*¯bı¯‘* (*The Wellsprings*), ed. and partially trans. into French by H.

Corbin, *Trilogie isma´ elienne* (Tehran: 1961), English trans. in [85]. For

an English translation of the table of contents of these works, seeWalker

[86], appendix (104–18).

21 A good example is his *al-Yana¯bı¯‘*, on which see the preceding note.

22 The following summary of al-Kirm¯an¯ı’s thought is based largely on

Walker [87], ch. 5. For an even more detailed analysis of these and other

doctrines see de Smet [81].

23 On the works of al-Kirm¯an¯ı, see Walker [87], ch. 2. Those of special

philosophical importance are *Kit ¯ ab al-riy ¯ ad.*

, ed. A. Tamer (Beirut:

1960); *Kit ¯ ab r ¯ ah.*

*a al-‘aql*, ed. M. K¯amil H. usayn and M. H.

ilm¯ı (Cairo:

1953), ed. M. Gh¯alib (Beirut: 1983); *al-Aqw¯ al al-dhahabiyya*, ed. S.

.

al-S¯aw¯ı (Tehran: 1977); *al-Ris ¯ ala al-wad.*

*ı¯‘a fı¯ ma‘a¯ lim al-dı¯n*, ed. M.

‘¯A. al-H. urayr¯ı (Kuwait: 1987); and several short treatises available in

*Majmu¯ ‘at rasa¯ ‘il al-Kirma¯nı¯*, ed. M. Gha¯ lib (Beirut: 1987).

24 Gohlman [91], 18–19.

25 See, for example, his *Fad.*

*¯ a’ih.*

*al-b¯ at.*

*iniyya*, ed. A. Badawi (Cairo: 1964),

4, 9, 18, 36, 40.

26 See his *Dar‘ ta‘ ¯ arud.*

*al-‘aql wa al-naql*, ed. M. R. Salim (Cairo: 1971–),

vol. V, 323. For this and other such passages see the important study

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by Y. J. Michot, “A Mamlu¯ k Theologian’s Commentary on Avicenna’s

*Ris ¯ ala Ad.h.*

*awiyya*, Part I,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14 (2003), 149–

203, at 178 and esp. app. II, 199–203.

27 See for example his *Khit.*

*at.*

(Bulaq: 1853), vol. I, 395, and P. E.

Walker, “Al-Maqr¯ız¯ı and the F¯at.imids,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 7

(2003), 95.

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6 Avicenna and the Avicennian

Tradition

The scope of this chapter is dauntingly broad, since Avicenna was

the central figure in the history of Arabic-Islamic philosophy. Before

Avicenna, *falsafa* (Arabic Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophy)

and *kala¯m* (Islamic doctrinal theology) were distinct strands of

thought, even though a good deal of cross-fertilization took place

between them. After Avicenna, by contrast, the two strands fused

together and post-Avicennian *kala¯m* emerged as a truly Islamic philosophy,

a synthesis ofAvicenna’s metaphysics and Muslimdoctrine.

To talk about the sources, evolution, and influence of Avicenna’s

ideas is, in fact, to talk about over two thousand years of philosophical

activity. Avicenna’s sources begin with Aristotle in the fourth

century B.C.E. and include the late antique Greek Aristotle commentators,

both Peripatetic and Neoplatonist. Avicenna himself was

extremely prolific: between 40 and 275 titles have been attributed

to him by bibliographers ranging from his student Ju¯ zja¯nı¯ to the late

Egyptian scholar Georges Anawati, with approximately 130 reckoned

to be authentic by the Iranian scholar Yah. y¯a Mahdav¯ı.1 What is

more, his ideas evolved during the course of his career,with the result

that, as with Plato’s and Aristotle’s thought, Avicenna’s philosophy

will often resist our attempts to systematize it, and his position on

a number of important philosophical issues will appear frustratingly

underdetermined. As for Avicenna’s impact, it was felt acutely in

both the Islamic world and in Christian Europe. After several of his

major philosophical and medical works were translated into Latin at

the end of the twelfth century, Avicenna came to exert great influence

on European scholastic thought, an influence that was overshadowed

only by that of theAndalusianAristotle commentatorAbu¯

al-Wal¯ıd ibn Rushd, or Averroes (d. 1198). In post-classical Islamic

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intellectual history, by contrast, Avicenna’s influence was unparalleled,

andAverroes played only aminor role.2 Avicenna’s innovations

in metaphysics – his most important philosophical contributions –

were debated in the works of *mutakallimu¯ n* (i.e., those engaged in

constructing *kala¯m*) from both the mainstream Sunnı¯ and smaller

Sh¯ı‘¯ı branches of Islam right up to the advent of Islamic modernism

at the end of the nineteenth century.

How best to proceed, then, in light of the complex and wideranging

history of Avicenna’s sources, thought and legacy? To start

with, I shall not discuss the transmission of Avicennism into

medieval Latin philosophy, but leave that instead to Charles Burnett

in chapter 18.3 Second, I shall not discuss at any length the doctrines

of the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs, of Suhraward¯ı, or of Mull¯a S. adr¯ a, but leave those

instead to PaulWalker, JohnWalbridge, and SajjadRizvi in chapters 5,

10, and 11, respectively. Finally, I shall not examineAvicenna’s logic,

even though his innovations in that field shaped the subsequent logical

tradition in Islam as profoundly as his metaphysical innovations

did; I shall leave that task to Tony Street in chapter 12.

What I *shall* do is focus on the history of three basic philosophical

issues, the examination of which throws light on how Avicenna

appropriated ancient and late antique Greek philosophy, how his

ideas changed during his lifetime, and how some of those ideas came

to be naturalized in subsequent Islamic intellectual history by Sunn¯ı

and Shı¯‘ı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n*. The three issues are first, Avicenna’s theory

that a human rational soul comes into existence with the birth

of the body which it governs and uses, yet survives the body’s death;

second, his distinction between essence and existence; and third,

his analysis of God as the only being which, by virtue of itself and

nothing else, necessarily exists, in contrast to all other beings, which

necessarily exist only by virtue of another, namely, their cause.4

At the bottom of each of these three issues lurks a problem of

metaphysics. The metaphysical problem underlying the first issue

is one of “applied” ontology, so to speak: what is the soul, and how

does it cause the body inwhich it inheres? The second problem is also

ontological, but much more general: what are the most fundamental

components of reality? The third question is one of theology and

cosmology: what is God, and how does he cause the universe? Before

plunging into these deep and frigid waters I should take a moment

to describe Avicenna’s upbringing.

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background and education

Abu¯ ‘Alı¯ al-H. usayn ibn ‘Abdalla¯h ibn Sı¯na¯ , known in theWest by his

Latinized name Avicenna, was born some time before the year 980,

in a village called Afshana near the city of Bukh¯ar¯ a, in what is now

Uzbekistan. Avicenna’s father originally came from the city of Balkh

(next toM¯az¯ ar-i Shar¯ıf in what is now Afghanistan) and had moved to

Bukh¯ar¯a during the reign of Nuh.

ibnMans.u¯ r, a prince of the house of

the S¯am¯anids, who ruled northeastern Iran and parts of Transoxania

during the latter part of the tenth century. Avicenna’s father was

appointed the governor of an important village, Kharmaythan, which

was situated near a smaller village, Afshana, where he lived with his

wife and where Avicenna and his younger brother were born. The

family moved to Bukh¯ar¯a – the big city – when Avicenna was a young

boy, and there Avicenna studied the Qur’ ¯an and Arabic literature

(*adab*) with two different teachers, exhibiting even at the age of ten

the intellectual independence that would characterize his studies for

the next ten years or so.

Avicenna’s first encounter with philosophy came through listening

in on discussions his father had with Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı missionaries. The

Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs were a subsect of the Sh¯ı‘¯ıs, themselves the largest minority

sect in Islam, the majority being the Sunn¯ıs. The disagreement

between Sh¯ı‘¯ıs and Sunn¯ıs arose over the Prophet Muh.ammad’s

succession. Following Muh.ammad’s death in 632, one group gelled

around the figure of ‘Al¯ı, Muh.ammad’s cousin and son-in-law, and

came eventually to be called Sh¯ı‘a ‘Al¯ı, the “Party of ‘Al¯ı.” However

it was not ‘Alı¯ but Muh. ammad’s companion Abu¯ Bakr who

emerged as the Prophet’s successor, or caliph, and ‘Al¯ı and his

descendents, along with their followers, the Sh¯ı‘¯ıs, ended up being

largely excluded from political power during the centuries that

followed.

When Avicenna’s father was a young man, in the middle of the

tenth century, three centuries of Sh¯ı‘¯ı disappointment and frustration

seemed finally to be ending. A Persian Sh¯ı‘¯ı family, the Buwayhids,

captured the imperial capital Baghdad in 945, fatally weakening

the already sickly caliphate of the Sunn¯ı ‘Abb¯asid family, who

had ruled there since 750. More importantly for Avicenna’s father,

a North African Sh¯ı‘¯ı family called the F¯at.imids conquered Egypt in

969 and set up an anti-caliphate in Cairo, from which Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı–Sh¯ı‘¯ı

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missionaries fanned out across Iraq and Iran, gaining converts and

hoping to lay the ground for an Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı revolution.

Despite the difficulties – even persecution – that Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs faced in

Khur¯as¯an and Transoxania, it could well have seemed to Avicenna’s

father that things were finally going the Sh¯ı‘¯ıs way, and perhaps as

a result of this perception he became one of those who, as Avicenna

put it, “responded positively to the missionary of the Egyptians and

was reckoned to be an Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı.”5With his Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı friendsAvicenna’s

father used to discuss Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı theories about the nature of the soul

and the intellect, theories which Avicenna listened to but which, he

baldly asserts, he refused to accept. Whether the young boy spurned

his father’s attempts to bring him into the fold of the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs as

an act of pre-adolescent rebellion or out of genuine philosophical

dissatisfaction, it seems not to have spoilt their relationship, since

Avicenna’s father then arranged for him to be tutored in Islamic

jurisprudence by aH.

anaf¯ı, that is, a member of one of the four Sunn¯ı –

as opposed to Sh¯ı‘¯ı – schools of legal thought.6

His religious education more or less complete, Avicenna was then

tutored in philosophy by a journeyman sophist named N¯atil¯ı, with

whom the ten-year-old read the Arabic translation of Porphyry’s

*Isagoge*, the standard introduction to logic (and to philosophy generally)

in the late antique and medieval Islamic worlds. Quickly realizing

– and demonstrating – that he was far cleverer than his teacher,

Avicenna embarked, with his father’s blessing, on a course of intense

self-education, guided less and less byN¯atil¯ı, who left town in search

of a more educable pupil. All by himself Avicenna read the works of

Euclid and Ptolemy on arithmetic and geometry, and moved through

the texts that made up the Aristotelian corpus, starting with logic,

then natural philosophy, and finally metaphysics. It is very important

to note that in addition to the Arabic versions of Aristotle’s texts,

Avicenna read many of the Greek commentaries on those texts, commentaries

which had also been translated into Arabic in the ninth

and tenth centuries.7

Using the word “read” to describe what Avicenna did when he

sat down with a pile of philosophical texts and commentaries is a

bit misleading. Unlike most of us Avicenna read in a very active

way: he took notes, of course, but more than that he reduced all the

arguments articulated in a philosophical text to their constituent

premises, and then put those premises in the correct syllogistic

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order so that the conclusions they produced were valid, at least in

those cases where the author’s argument was cogent. In other words,

Avicenna not only read and took notes on the Aristotelian texts and

commentaries, he analyzed them. In the process he produced for himself

a large set of files that he could turn to whenever he needed to

remind himself of the structure of a particular argument.

Avicenna read widely as well as intensively. His skill as a physician

brought him into the orbit of his father’s employer, Prince Nu¯ h.

ibn Mans.u¯ r, who gave the young polymath permission to conduct

research in the S¯am¯anids’ library in Bukh¯ar¯a in return for Avicenna’s

attendance upon him. In that library Avicenna encountered a vast

trove of literature, with each of the library’s rooms dedicated to a

different field of inquiry. There, Avicenna claims, he read works of

the ancients (*al-awa¯ ’il*) which he had never come across before nor

was ever to see again later in his life; absorbed what was useful in

them; and in so doing completed the course of self-education he had

begun eight years earlier:

When I reached my eighteenth year I was done with all these sciences. And

while at that time I had a better memory for [such] knowledge, I am more

mature today; otherwise the knowledge [itself] is one and the same thing,

nothing new having come to me afterward [i.e., after the age of eighteen].8

what is the soul and how does it cause

the body?

It is hard to imagine that the ten-year-old Avicenna was turned off

by Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı ideas about the soul and the intellect because he had himself

already come up with, or simply encountered, a more plausible

theory. Avicenna was precocious, but not that precocious. Nevertheless

the mature Avicenna’s theory of the soul was markedly different

from that of his father’s friends, the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs. Like Aristotle and

Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. 205 C.E., the first great commentator

on Aristotle), Avicenna believed that the human rational soul comes

into existence at the same time as the body in which it inheres; and

Avicenna is also crystal clear in rejecting transmigration, a theory

closely associated with Plato and Plotinus (d. 270 C.E., the founder

of the school of Neoplatonism), a version of which was followed by

some Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı thinkers. On the other hand, Avicenna did believe –

this time like Plato and Plotinus – that the human rational soul

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continues to exist even after the death of the body in which it formerly

inhered.9

At first glance Avicenna’s position looks like a conscious and

rather crude attempt to reconcile Aristotle and Alexander with Plato

and Plotinus. Upon closer analysis, Avicenna’s position turns out to

be a reflection of his hermeneutical context. By the time Avicenna

was composing his first philosophical treatises, the ancient way of

interpreting Aristotle’s works, that associated with Alexander, had

been superseded by a new method, one associated with Ammonius

(fl. ca. 490 C.E.), son of Hermeias, as well as with Ammonius’ students

such as Asclepius (fl. 525 C.E.) and more importantly, John

Philoponus (d. ca. 570 C.E.). After five centuries of successful development,

the new, Ammonian method had come to be seen as such

a natural approach to reading Aristotle, that in 1000 C.E. Avicenna

would have been unaware that his view of the soul differed in any

significant way from that of Aristotle. In other words, Avicenna’s

position on the human rational soul’s separability ought not to be

seen as an attempt to stuff a square Plato into a round Aristotle, but

instead as the product of the fusion of two hermeneutical projects,

a fusion that had been going on for five hundred years or so before

Avicenna was born.

By “fusion of two hermeneutical projects” I mean the following.

First, Aristotle’s very large body of work is not entirely consistent

on issues as widely discussed and as fundamental as the relationship

between body and soul. As a result, the first commentators on

Aristotle, such as Alexander, played a crucial role in constructing a

single coherent Aristotelian doctrine out of the sometimes incompatible

doctrines and assertions found in Aristotle’s many writings.

(Elsewhere I refer to this project – the attempt to reconcile Aristotle

with Aristotle – as the “lesser harmony.”)10 Later on, building on the

work of Porphyry (d. 309C.E.) and other early Neoplatonists, philosophers

such as Proclus (d. ca. 485 C.E.) were engaged in another, more

ambitious harmonization project: reconciling Aristotle with Plato

(which I call the “greater harmony”). But Proclus’ efforts at reconciling

Plato and Aristotle found expression in a few enormous

independent treatises (e.g., *The Platonic Theology*) as well as in his

lengthy commentaries on Platonic works such as the *Timaeus*, *Parmenides*,

and the *Republic*. What Proclus left to his student Ammonius

was the task begun tentatively by Proclus’ own teacher Syrianus

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(d. ca. 437 C.E.), the task of folding the greater harmony into the

lesser harmony. In practice this meant composing commentaries

on Aristotle’s treatises in such a way that those passages in which

Aristotle articulates ideas that are most reconcilable with Plato’s

ideas are spotlighted and then joined together to form the basis of a

newly systematized Aristotelian philosophy – one that was identifiable

at some deep level with Proclus’ newly systematized Platonic

philosophy. The task of advancing the Ammonian synthesis – of folding

the greater harmony into the lesser harmony – was in turn passed

along to Ammonius’ students Asclepius and Philoponus, several of

whose commentaries on Aristotle were translated into Arabic in the

ninth and tenth centuries.11

The notion that the soul exists before the birth of the body to

which it comes eventually to be attached, and also survives its death,

had its first major elaboration in Plato’s work, and specifically in his

*Phaedo*. Plotinus expanded upon and systematized this theory in

his *Enneads*, bits and pieces of which were translated into Arabic

in the ninth century, reworked, attributed to Aristotle, and entitled

*Theology of Aristotle* (*Uth ¯ ul ¯ ujiy ¯ a Arist.*

*u¯ t.a¯ lı¯s*). According to the version

of Plotinian psychology found in the *Theology of Aristotle*, the

soul has two tendencies, one upward towards the world of intellect,

the other downwards towards the world of matter.12 The birth of

a baby, or perhaps even conception, represents the moment when

descending soul, having (as it were) “split off” from the Universal

Soul, finds itself individuated in a particular body which is disposed

to receive it. During its lifetime of attachment to the body the soul

is constantly tempted by the possibility of indulging in bodily pleasures,

and some souls give in. Other souls take the longer view, having

realized that the more time spent doing philosophy, and the less

time spent engaging in self-gratification, will ultimately reduce the

number of cycles of death and rebirth before the final moment when,

the perfect number of cycles having been completed, the soul can

join the other permanent inhabitants of the intelligible world, never

again to be dragged down into the world of matter. This theory, or

at least important aspects of it, was embraced by Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ı thinkers

of the tenth century (such as Abu¯ Ya‘qu¯ b al-Sijzı¯, a.k.a. al-Sijista¯nı¯,

fl. ca. 960) as well as by others who have been associated with the

Isma¯ ‘ı¯lı¯s (such as the “Brethren of Purity” – *Ikhwa¯n al-S. afa¯ ’*, fl. ca.

980), and it is probably quite close to the picture Avicenna’s father

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is said to have painted during his philosophy sessions with fellow

Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs, given that al-Sijz¯ı had been active in Bukh¯ar¯a just before

that period.

In *De Anima*, II, by contrast, Aristotle defines the soul – describes

it, to be precise – as the “first *entelekheia* of a natural instrumental

body possessing life potentially.” One of the challenges facing

the Greek commentators on the *De Anima* was figuring out exactly

what Aristotle meant by *entelekheia*, a termwhich he invented and

which he also used to define change (*kinˆesis*) in *Physics*, III. The

consensus amongst scholars nowadays is that we ought to translate

*entelekheia* as “actuality,” thereby making it more or less synonymous

with the Greek term*energeia*; and that we ought to worry less

about what Aristotle thinks an *entelekheia is* than what he thinks

the soul and change are *entelekheia*s *of*. Early Greek commentators

such as Alexander and Themistius (fl. 365 C.E.) were more determined

to fix upon an acceptable meaning for *entelekheia*, and specifically

a meaning that made sense in both of Aristotle’s definitions. To

that end Alexander and Themistius turned to another Greek term,

*teleiotˆes*, when they wished to gloss *entelekheia*. The commentators

reckoned that the range of meanings associated with *teleiotˆes*

was broad enough to cover Aristotle’s use of *entelekheia* to define

the soul in the *De Anima* as well as his use of *entelekheia* to define

change in the *Physics*. Alexander focused on the sense of “completeness”

and “completion” conveyed by *teleiotˆes*, that is, the sense in

which *teleiotˆes* was to be construed as the abstract noun associated

with the adjective *teleion*, “complete,” a term which Aristotle helpfully

defined in *Metaphysics*, V.16. Themistius added a new sense

to the range of meanings associated with *teleiotˆes*, one which I have

called “endedness” for lack of a more elegant word; it refers to the

sense in which a thing is either directed at or serves as a *telos*, or

“end.”

As with Alexander’s emphasis on completeness and completion,

which was motivated by a desire to come up with a set of meanings

broad enough to square Aristotle’s use of *entelekheia* to define the

soul with his use of *entelekheia* to define change, Themistius’ inclusion

of the notion of endedness in the semantic range of *teleiotˆes*

was also motivated by a hermeneutical commitment to the lesser

harmony, to the project of reconciling Aristotle with himself. But it

also gave the later commentators of the Ammonian synthesis a tool

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with which they could fashion an interpretation of Aristotle’s theory

of the soul that was more easily reconcilable with Plato’s.

When the Ammonian commentators on Aristotle’s texts, and

particularly on the *De Anima*, found themselves confronted by

Aristotle’s definition of the soul as an *entelekheia* – a term which

Plotinus had derided as connoting too much inseparability from the

body – they soon realized they could turn to Themistius for help.

Remember that Themistius added the notion of endedness – being

directed at an end or serving as an end – to themix of meanings associated

with *teleiotˆes*, the term which Alexander had first used to

gloss Aristotle’s opaque *entelekheia*. With Themistius’ understanding

of *teleiotˆes* in hand, the Ammonians could direct attention away

from the problem of *what the soul is* (i.e., what the soul is in relation

to the body), and toward the problem of *how the soul causes* (i.e.,

how the soul causes the body). The Ammonian commentators had

little room to maneuver if their focus was entirely confined to what

the soul *is*. After all, Aristotle had said the soul *is* an *entelekheia* –

that is, the soul is a state of being, namely, the state of being actual

as opposed to the state of being potential – and had also implied

that the soul’s relation to the body was analogous to the relationship

of form to matter. The analogy of form to matter led Alexander

to reason that the soul, according to Aristotle, is inseparable from

the body just as form is inseparable from matter (although form

and matter are of course distinguishable conceptually – *kata ton*

*logon*).

The Ammonian commentators’ move from analyzing the soul–

body relationship in terms of the relationship between two states of

being – actuality and potentiality – to analyzing it in terms of the

relationship between cause and effect, consisted in their focusing on

other passages in the *DeAnima* where the soul is described as causing

the body not only as its formal cause, but also as its efficient and final

cause. These passages presented the Ammonians with an exegetical

opportunity because earlier Neoplatonists such as Plutarch of

Athens, Syrianus, and Proclus, had argued quite persuasively that

Aristotle’s formal and material causes were crucially different from

his efficient and final causes. Following these earlier thinkers, the

Ammonians held that the formal and material causes are *inseparable*

*from* or *immanent in* their effects. The efficient and final causes,

by contrast, are *separate from* or *transcendent of* their effects.13

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The Ammonians then reasoned as follows: since Alexander,

the most authoritative Aristotelian commentator, had glossed

Aristotle’s *entelekheia* with *teleiotˆes*, and since Themistius had

added endedness – being directed at or serving as a *telos*, or final

cause – to the semantic range of *teleiotˆes*, the most likely way in

which the soul causes the body is therefore the way in which a final

cause acts on its effect. And given the fact that final causes are separate

from or transcend their effects, so the soul, as a final cause, will

be separate from or transcend its effect, the body.

In an attempt to come to grips with Aristotle’s assertion that the

soul causes the body not just as a final cause but as an efficient and

formal cause as well, an Ammonian commentator could retreat a

little from the strong version of this argument – that the soul causes

its effect *only* as a final cause, and that therefore the soul is *always*

separate from or transcends its effect – and maintain instead that the

*primary* way in which the soul causes the body is as a final cause.

The soul causes the body as an efficient and a formal cause as well,

but only in a secondary sense, since the soul’s formal causation and

efficient causation of the body can, with some aggressive interpreting

of Aristotle’s texts, be reduced to its final causality of the body.

What this meant in practice for late Ammonians such as Avicenna

is that the intellect – the part of the soul that seemed the surest candidate

for separability – was seen to act as a final cause on its effects,

namely, the lower faculties of the soul; for these lower faculties are

used by the intellect as instruments to help it think about universal

intelligibles and thereby come as close as possible to attaining its

own final cause, namely the eternality of the active intellect, which

is always thinking about universal intelligibles. In other words, my

intellect uses my soul’s lower faculties of motion and sensation,

which in turn use the parts of my body they are associated with, be

they muscles in the limbs or the sense organs.Myintellectmight use

my faculty of motion to convey me to the library, where I can read

an Avicennian text and thereby come to think about universal intelligibles;

or my intellectmight use my faculty of sensation to observe

repeated instances of individual things, and thereby lay the ground

for its apprehension of abstracted universals. The ultimate goal of the

intellect’s employment of the soul’s lower faculties, and of the soul’s

lower faculties’ employment of the muscles or sense organs they are

associated with, remains the realization of individual immortality,

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the kind of immortality that is available – in the sublunary world at

least – only to human rational souls, since the souls of animals and

plants can attain immortality only as species, by means of sexual

reproduction, and not as individuals.

The advantage of this line of analysis is that it allowed Ammonian

commentators to focus on those passages in the Aristotelian corpus

where Aristotle, while not expressly advocating the idea, allowed

for the possibility that the intellectual part of the soul survived the

death of the body.14 To the earlier commentators such as Alexander

these passages seemed little more than Aristotle’s passing fancies,

off-the-cuff remarks that were so clearly contradicted by other, more

canonical passages that it would be irresponsible for a commentator

to cite them in an effort to undermine Aristotle’s core doctrine of the

soul’s inseparability. But to the Arabic heirs of the Ammonian synthesis

the soul’s separability, understood in a restricted sense as the

transcendence of the intellectual part of the soul and its survival after

the body’s death, was an interpretation of Aristotle’s ontology of the

soul that was justifiable on textual as well as theoretical grounds. In

fact, a sign of the Ammonian synthesis’ powerful momentum can be

detected in some of the early Arabic translations of Aristotle’s works,

those undertaken in the beginning and middle of the ninth century.

In the Arabic version of the *Metaphysics* and in the earliest version of

the *De Anima*, as well as in many of the early Arabic paraphrases and

summaries of those works, the Greek terms *entelekheia*, *teleiotˆes*,

and *telos* were most often rendered into Arabic using the same term,

*tama¯m*. The upshot is that when viewed in its proper context, as the

product of a thousand-year history of shifting interpretive projects,

Avicenna’s theory that the soul comes into existence with the body

but that it survives the body’s death – or at least that the intellectual

part of the soul survives the body’s death – is in no sense contradicted

by his close reading of and deep commitment to the Arabic

Aristotle’s texts and theories.

Even though the interpretive tradition to whichAvicenna was heir

determined the overall contours of his position that the soul was in

some way separable from the body, he also offered some original

arguments of his own. The most famous of them is his discussion

of the “floating man,” which turns out to be less an argument than

a mnemonic device. At the end of the first book of the *De Anima*

(*Kita¯b al-nafs*) part of his great philosophical *summa*, *The Healing*

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(*al-Shifa¯ ’*), Avicenna asks that we move beyond the stage of considering

the soul in the context of its relationship to the body, in which

context we speak of it as “soul” and define it as the first perfection

of a natural instrumental body. What is required, Avicenna says, is

that we get some sense of what the substance we call “soul” is once

we take the body out of the equation.With this aiminmind he offers

a thought experiment: imagine that you have come into being fully

mature and are floating in completely still air, with limbs splayed

so that they do not touch each other, with your eyes covered in a

membrane that prevents you from seeing anything, and with your

other sense organs similarly unable to apprehend any object. In that

state of total sensory deprivation, with no awareness of anything

physical, would you affirm your own existence? Avicenna says yes,

of course you would: in that state you would never doubt the existence

of your self, even though you would not be able to affirm the

existence of any part of your body. The substance that we call “soul”

when placed in relation to “body,” and which we further define as

the first perfection of a natural instrumental body, turns out to be

this “self” (*dha¯ t*). What is more, one’s instinctive knowledge that

one *would* affirm the existence of one’s self in such a state of total

sensory deprivation constitutes a “hint” or “indication” (*isha¯ ra*) of

the soul’s essential immateriality.15

Much has been made of the apparent similarity between

Avicenna’s floating man and Descartes’ *cogito*, and some have even

wondered whether this passage might prove to be one of the textual

sources of the *cogito*. Others have argued (and I agree) that the similarity,

though striking, turns out on closer inspection to be quite

superficial, since the context and purpose of the floating man were

so different from those of the *cogito*.16 Avicenna’s floating man was

not even meant to serve as a “proof” of anything: it is only a hint

of what the soul is outside of the context of its relationship to the

body, a hint that reminds us of the soul’s essential immateriality.

Avicenna’s hope was that when his advanced students were stuck

in the middle of some complex proof of the soul’s separability from

the body, they would not fall prey to sophistical arguments whose

goal was to convince them that the soul was an atom, or some type

of material object. With Avicenna’s floating man always ready to

remind them of the conclusion they must reach, their argumentative

path would be surer. Avicenna extended this method of hinting

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and indicating to cover all of his basic philosophical positions in his

last major work, entitled *The Pointers and Reminders* (*al-Isha¯ ra¯ t wa*

*al-tanbı¯ha¯ t*), which, like the floating man passage, was written with

his most advanced students in mind.

Up to now I have concentrated on a theory – the human rational

soul’s survival of its body’s death – that highlights the philosophical

continuity between Avicenna and earlier thinkers. Avicenna’s

theory of the soul’s separability is, in a sense, the culmination of

what I earlier called the Ammonian synthesis, that is, the project

of the Aristotle commentator Ammonius and his students, to integrate

the greater harmony (i.e., reconciling Plato and Aristotle) of

Neoplatonists such as Proclus into the lesser harmony (i.e., reconciling

Aristotle with himself) of early Aristotle commentators such as

Alexander.17 As far as subsequent Islamic intellectual history is concerned,

however, Avicenna’s theory – that after death *only* the rational

soul survives – was something of a cul-de-sac. It is true that most

post-Avicennian thinkers agreedwith Avicenna’s claimthat the soul

survives death. It is also true that these thinkers embraced important

aspects of Avicenna’s psychology, for example his ideas about

the structure of the soul’s faculties and about the role of intuition in

epistemology. But most maintained, in contrast toAvicenna, that the

body enjoyed some kind of afterlife too. (The extent to which one’s

future body is identical to one’s current body, and the sense inwhich

“body” can be understood metaphorically, as something immaterial,

posed philosophical challenges for them.) Eschatology was the motivation

here, since Avicenna’s idea contradicts the Islamic doctrine

of bodily resurrection.

The Muslim thinker who came out most famously against

Avicenna’s denial of bodily resurrection was the Sunn¯ı thinker

al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı (d. 1111), author of an elegant synopsis of Avicenna’s

philosophy entitled *The Aims of the Philosophers* (*Maqa¯ s. id alfala*

*¯ sifa*), a work that bears a very close connection to Avicenna’s

Persian *summa*, *The Book of Knowledge for [Prince] ‘Ala¯ ’*

*[al-Dawla]* (*Da¯nishna¯ma-yi ‘Ala¯ ’ı¯*). With the *Aims* in hand, al-

Ghaz¯ al¯ı had a ready source of raw material from which to draw in

his frontal attack on Avicenna, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*

(*Taha¯ fut al-fala¯ sifa*). In the *Incoherence*, al-Ghaza¯ lı¯ focused on three

of Avicenna’s theses whose logical implications warranted condemnation

as disbelief (*takf¯ır*): the denial of bodily resurrection, which

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is entailed by Avicenna’s thesis that after the body’s death, only the

soul survives; the denial of God’s knowledge of particular things,

which is entailed by Avicenna’s thesis that God knows particulars

only in a universal way; and the denial of the world’s temporal originatedness,

which is entailed by Avicenna’s thesis that the world,

though caused by God, is co-eternal with him.

Partly as a result of al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s attack, Avicenna’s thesis that

after death *only* the soul survives – and his theses that God knows

particulars in a universal way and that the world is co-eternal with

God – found little sympathy amongst later Muslim thinkers. That is

not to say that all of Avicenna’s ideas were dead ends, or worse, to

restate the often-repeated claim, now discredited, that al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s

attack succeeded in extinguishing philosophical activity in postclassical

Islamic intellectual history. On issues other than these

three, the conceptual connections between Avicenna and both earlier

and later Sunnı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n*, his supposed enemies, are in fact

much closer than we have been led to believe. What I shall next

focus on is Avicenna’s distinction between essence and existence,

a quasi-innovation which shows how Avicenna both received and

appropriated previous Sunnı¯ *kala¯m* discussions, in this case about

the difference between a thing and an existent.18

essence and existence

It is difficult for us nowadays to sympathize much with medieval

philosophers, for whom the basic elements of reality were not physical

objects, however tiny (molecules, atoms, neutrons, etc.), but

rather ontological categories (substance, thing, existent, etc.). Generally

speaking, Mu‘tazilı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n*, who formed the first school

of Islamic doctrinal theology, were of the opinion that “thing” (*shay’*)

was the most broadly applicable category in reality, and that “thing”

was in turn divisible into the subcategories “existent” (*mawju¯ d*) and

“nonexistent” (*ma‘du¯m*).

There are two main reasons why the Mu‘tazil¯ıs were committed

to the ontological primacy of “thing.” The first is that the

early Arabic grammarians were virtually unanimous in holding that

“thing” refers to all that can be placed in relation to a predicate. In

other words “thing” is the most universal subject, one that cannot be

subsumed under any broader category or genus. The second reason

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was that the Qur’ ¯an, in a pair of widely cited verses, describes God’s

creative act as consisting in God’s saying “Be!” to a *thing*, at which

point the thing then *is*.19 To theMu‘tazil¯ıs this was a clear indication

that a thing can be either nonexistent or existent: a thing is nonexistent

before God says “Be!” to it, and it is existent after God says “Be!”

to it. Yet the Mu‘tazil¯ıs were never quite sure what a nonexistent

thing might look like, and attacks on their ontology came to revolve

more and more around their seeming inability to solve the problem

of the “thingness of the nonexistent” (*shay’iyya al-ma‘du¯m*).

What exactly does a Mu‘tazil¯ı mean when he asserts that a thing

*is* nonexistent? Where exactly “is” a nonexistent thing? In God’s

mind, perhaps? If outside God’s mind, then where? Is there one single

and undifferentiated nonexistent Thing somewhere, out of which

an individual thing is siphoned into existence once God says “Be!”

to it? Or is there a multiplicity of nonexistent things, each ready and

prepared for the moment when God says “Be!” to it? The Mu‘tazil¯ıs

gave a fairly clear answer at least to the question of the existential

status of mental objects. Universal concepts, such as “horseness,”

and fictional entities, such as a unicorn, are things, but because universal

concepts and fictional entities are found only in the mind and

not in the extramental world, they are, strictly speaking, nonexistent

things. Objects that it is impossible to conceive of, such as square

circles, are not even nonexistent things.

Sunnı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n* of the Ash‘arı¯ and Ma¯ turı¯dı¯ schools, who

began to eclipse the Mu‘tazil¯ıs in prominence at the end of the tenth

century, held an opposing view. They believed in a strong identification

of thing and existent, not merely holding that the domain

of things is coextensive with the domain of existents (that is, every

thing will also be an existent, and every existent will also be a thing),

but also holding that the meaning of “thing” and the meaning of

“existent” are one and the same. The Sunnı¯*mutakallimu¯ n* reckoned

that this strong identification between thing and existent enabled

them to argue more clearly and forcefully for God’s creation of the

world out of absolutely nothing. This was because the Mu‘tazil¯ı

doctrine that God created existent things out of nonexistent things

(or out of a single nonexistent Thing) could be taken to imply that

these pre-existent things (or Thing) in some sense kept God company

before the creation of the world; and this in turn would undermine

the Mu‘tazil¯ıs’ fundamental tenet that God alone possessed

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the attribute of eternality. To the Sunn¯ıs, by contrast, nothing meant

*no thing*: nothing had no ontological value whatsoever, unlike the

Mu‘tazil¯ıs nonexistent thing.

The fly in the Sunn¯ıs’ ointment was the status of mental objects.

On the one hand mental objects could be considered to be existents

just as extramental, concrete objects were. In that case an existent in

the mind such as “horseness” or a unicorn will deserve to be called

an existent just as much as this horse here in the stable does, and

the boundary between mental existence and concrete existence will

become blurry. The alternative – preferred by most Sunn¯ıs – was

to deny that mental objects have any kind of existence whatsoever.

The problem then becomes avoiding the inference that since neither

universal concepts such as “horseness,” nor fictional entities

such as unicorns, nor impossibilities such as square circles, exist

concretely in the extramental world, all will be *equally* nonexistent,

a conclusion that seems counterintuitive, given that “horseness”

and unicorns, which you or I are able not only to make assertions

about but also conceive of, seem fundamentally different from square

circles, which we can make assertions about but certainly cannot

conceive of.

Generally speaking, and most explicitly in his *Book of [Grammatical]*

*Particles* (*Kita¯b al-h. uru¯ f*), the tenth-century philosopher al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı adopts theMu‘tazil¯ı view, holding that “thing” is the supreme

genus, which can be distinguished into the species “existent” and the

species “nonexistent.” But al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı does allow that existent has a

function which thing does not: as the copula in an assertoric proposition

(i.e., a proposition with no modal qualifier such as “possibly”

or “necessarily”). Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı claims that in place of the copula “is” in

the proposition “Zayd is a just man,” one can use “existent” instead:

“Zayd [is] existent [as] a just man.” But, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı argues, one cannot

replace the “is” here with “thing,” since “Zayd [is] thing [as] a just

man” makes no sense. The rules of Arabic grammar make al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s

point less confusing than it might at first appear, but even so, he

does seem to be straining to find some way to distinguish his own

position from that of the Mu‘tazil¯ıs. Nevertheless al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s theory

reveals that there is a role for the term “existent” – as a copula –

that “thing” cannot play, and that regardless of the extent of their

respective domains “thing” and “existent” do have two very different

meanings.

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Avicenna’s own set of positions on this issue comes across as a

series of compromises between the Mu‘tazil¯ıs’ and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s elevation

of thing as the supreme genus, and the Sunn¯ıs’ strong identification

of thing and existent; but also one that takes into consideration

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s point that thing and existent cannot have the same meaning,

given the different uses each term can be put to. In *Metaphysics*

1.5 of his *Healing*, when Avicenna speaks in terms of things and

existents – when he speaks, that is, in the old ontological idiom of

the *mutakallimu¯ n* – his position is clear: “thing” and “existent” are

extensionally identical but intensionally different. In other words,

Avicenna maintains that while the domains of things and existents

are coextensive, their meanings are distinct. Even though there will

never be a thing which is not also an existent, nor an existent which

is not also a thing, this is not to say that “thing” means nothing

other than “existent” and that “existent” means nothing other than

“thing.” When we speak of an object as a “thing,” we are referring to a

different aspect of that object than when we speak of the object as an

“existent.” Nevertheless, Avicenna stresses that “thing” and “existent”

are co-implied (*mutala¯ zima¯ni*): you cannot find a thing which

is not also an existent, nor an existent which is not also a thing.

According to Avicenna, how do “thing” and “existent” differ in

meaning? When we refer to an object as a thing, or, to be more precise,

when we speak of an object’s thingness (*shay’iyya*), what we are

referring to is a differentiating quality which sets that object apart

from another thing: a quality which “makes” the object one thing as

opposed to another thing. Thus the thingness of a cat – its catness –

is what sets it apart from a horse, whose thingness, of course, is

horseness. When we speak of an object as an existent, however, we

are not referring to *what* the object is – i.e., one thing as opposed to

another thing – but rather *that* the object is – i.e., an existent.

Holding that thing and existent are co-implied forced Avicenna to

maintain that mental objects such as horseness, and concrete objects

such as this horse here in the stable, will both warrant being called

existents. A mental object – e.g., horseness – is “an existent in the

mind” (*mawju¯ d fı¯ al-dhihn*), whereas a concrete object – e.g., this

horse here in the stable – is “an existent amongst [concrete] individuals”

(*mawju¯ d fı¯ al-a‘ya¯n*). Avicenna, in short, committed himself to

the existence of mental objects in a way that earlier *mutakallimu¯ n*

had balked at.

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But Avicenna’s ideas were more slippery than this, by which I

mean that in various different works, written for different audiences

and at different points in his career, he advocated positions on this

question which, in the end, must be seen as inconsistent. Part of the

reason for this is that Avicenna straddled two worlds: the world of

*falsafa* and the world of *kala¯m*. His discussions of the relationship

between thing and existent are clearly informed by previous *kala¯m*

debates: both the terminology and the issues at stake are identical.

But whenAvicenna adopts the language of the ArabicAristotle and of

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, a slight conceptual shift is detectable. Instead of analyzing

the relationship between thing and existent, Avicenna speaks of the

relationship between essence (*ma¯hiyya*, literally “whatness”) and

existence (*wuju¯ d*). The term he uses for essence, *ma¯hiyya*, comes

from the Arabic version of the various logic texts that constitute the

*Organon*, in which a definition, when properly constructed, is held

to indicate the essence (*ma¯hiyya*) of a thing.

An example of his inconsistency is that in *Metaphysics* 7.1 of *The*

*Healing*, Avicenna implies that it is not *thing* and existent which are

co-implied, but instead *one* and existent, and that *thing* is equally

applicable to both one and existent. Such a position sounds dangerously

close to theMu‘tazil¯ıs’ and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s views, since thing seems

now to be a genus under which existent is subsumed. Even if we

permit Avicenna to deny having advocated an ontological scheme –

analogous to the Mu‘tazil¯ıs’ and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s – in which “thing” is

extensionally broader than existent, thing will at least be seen now

to enjoy a logical priority over existent, that is, to be viewed as more

basic than existent.

Even more anxiety-provoking is the fact that in a famous passage

from *Isagoge* 1.2 of *The Healing*, Avicenna implies that thing

and existent may not even be extensionally identical. There he says

that the essences of things (*ma¯hiyya¯ t al-ashya¯ ’*) will sometimes be

found in concrete objects in the extramental world, and at other

times they will be conceived of in the mind. However, essence has

*three* aspects: as a concrete, extramental existent; as a mental existent;

and a third aspect, in which it is unrelated to either concrete or

mental existence. A commentator could fairly infer from Avicenna’s

assertion that essence is not only logically prior to existence, it is

also extensionally broader than existence. After all, Avicenna now

holds that there are essences which are *neither* mental nor concrete

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existents; therefore every existent will also be an essence, but not

every essence will be an existent. It appears, then, that Avicenna

fluctuated between the Sunn¯ı and the Mu‘tazil¯ı positions, between

thinking on the one hand that thing and existent are extensionally

identical, and on the other hand that essence is extensionally broader

than existence, or at the very least that essence is logically prior to

existence.

By now it will have become clear that Avicenna’s discussions of

the relationship between essence and existence are quite underdetermined.

In fact three different Avicennian positions have been articulated:

(I) thing and existent, and by implication essence and existence,

are extensionally identical and intensionally distinct, with

neither enjoying any kind of priority over the other; (II) essence and

existence are extensionally identical and intensionally distinct, but

essence enjoys a logical priority over existence; and (III) essence is

extensionally broader than existence and each is intensionally distinct

from the other. Adding to the confusion is Avicenna’s use of

so many different terms for essence – not only the two already mentioned,

*ma¯hiyya* (whatness) and *shay’iyya* (thingness), but also *dha¯ t*

(self), *h.*

*aq¯ıqa* (inner reality), *s.*

*¯ ura* (form), and *t.*

*ab‘* (nature), amongst

others – that it is sometimes unclear to a reader if he or she is

actually in the middle of a discussion of the relationship between

essence and existence. In spite of this ambivalence most subsequent

treatments of the distinction in Islamic intellectual history came to

use the pair of terms *ma¯hiyya* and *wuju¯ d* for essence and existence,

respectively.

The result is that Avicenna can be judged to have succeeded in

moving the discussion of general ontology from one that revolved

around the old, *kala¯m* distinction between thing and existent, to

one that revolved around the new, Avicennian distinction between

essence and existence. In other words, Avicenna’s contribution here

lay in his framing of the distinction, rather than in his having

invented the distinction out of thin air. By “framing the distinction”

I do not mean that Avicenna merely supplied the basic terms

used in subsequent discussions, *ma¯hiyya* and *wuju¯ d*. I also mean

that Avicenna laid down a limited number of positions on the distinction,

positions that would eventually formthe core of a radically

expanded spectrum of positions.

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To illustrate the framing role that Avicenna played, I shall point

to a number of post-Avicennian philosophers, two of whom staked

extreme, though opposing, positions on the essence/existence distinction,

with the others fighting over the middle ground. At one

end of the spectrum, Suhraward¯ı (d. 1191) maintained that essence

was primary and basic, that is to say, real in the most basic sense,

while existence got lumped together with other unreal products

of conceptual distinction-making. For Mull¯a S. adr¯a (d. 1640), existence

was primary and real, whereas essence was a mental construct.

These two opposing positions came to be termed, respectively, *as.a¯ la*

*al-ma¯hiyya* (literally, the “foundationality” of essence) and *as.a¯ la*

*al-wuju¯ d* (the “foundationality” of existence).

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I shall not go into

detail in discussing Suhraward¯ı’s and Mull¯a S. adr¯a’s theories, because

that is a task better left to the experts who have written chapters 9

and 10, respectively. My point in bringing these two thinkers up is

simply to point out that each of them advocates a position on essence

and existence that is so radically different from Avicenna’s that to

call either an Avicennist, or part of the Avicennian tradition, would

be to make the adjective “Avicennian” so elastic that it ends up

covering all (or at least the vast majority of) philosophical activity

in post-classical Islamic intellectual history; and this would be to

render it a trivial term.

The middle ground between Suhraward¯ı’s and Mull¯a S. adr¯a’s

extreme positions was fought over by many generations of *mutakallimu*

*¯ n*, including the Twelver-Shı¯‘ı¯ al-T. u¯ sı¯ (d. 1274) and the

Sunn¯ı-Ash‘ar¯ı al-R¯az¯ı (d. 1210). In his *Commentary* on the title

(“On Existence and its Causes”) of the Fourth Section (*Namat.*

) of

Avicenna’s *Pointers*, al-T. u¯ sı¯ articulated a much milder version of

essentialism than Suhraward¯ı had, holding that essence and existence

were co-implied, but that existence should in fact be seen as

nothing more than an accident (*‘arad.*

) of essence. Al-T. u¯ sı¯ reckoned

that in the case of all beings other than the First Cause, existence is

extensionally identical but intensionally distinct from essence. Yet

existence is only an accident of essence – a necessary accident, to

be sure, but an accident nonetheless. Therefore al-T. u¯ sı¯’s position

echoes Avicenna’s position (II), that though extensionally identical,

essence is logically prior to existence.20

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Al-R¯az¯ı’s theory is more difficult to pin down. As I mentioned

above, the classical position of Sunnı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n* had been that

thing and existent – and by implication, essence and existence – were

not just extensionally identical, they were intensionally identical as

well. That is to say, essence meant nothing more or less than existence,

and vice versa. But by al-R¯az¯ı’s time Avicenna’s distinction

between essence and existence had become so much a standard part

of philosophical discourse that Sunnı¯*mutakallimu¯ n* could not afford

simply to reassert their old position of hard identity between essence

and existence. This was partly because the compositeness which

a distinction between essence and existence entailed had become

so useful in proving God’s existence: every being is a composite of

essence and existence; every composite requires a composer to bring

its composite parts together; therefore every composite is caused; and

in order to avoid aninfinite regress of composites and composers, and

hence of effects and causes, we will need to terminate at some being

which is not composed; this being is God.

Given the usefulness of holding that essence and existence are

intensionally distinct, it is not that surprising that post-Avicennian

Sunnı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n* softened their earlier, rock-hard identification

of essence with existence, an identification that had been the

basis of their pre-Avicennian ontology. At one point in his *Commentary*

on Avicenna’s *Pointers* al-R¯az¯ı advocates Avicenna’s position

(I), namely, that while extensionally identical, essence and

existence are intensionally distinct.21 Similarly, in his *Commentary*

*on the Nasafite Creed*, the Sunn¯ı-M¯atur¯ıd¯ı *mutakallim* al-

Taft ¯az¯an¯ı (d. 1390) resists embracing Avicenna’s position (I) too

openly, but the idea that essence and existence are intensionally

distinct though extensionally identical is clearly implied in his

comments.22

Most striking of all is the position advocated by the Sunn¯ı-Ash‘ar¯ı

*mutakallim* al-Is.fah¯an¯ı (d. 1348), in his commentary on his fellow

Ash‘ar¯ı *mutakallim* Bayd. ¯aw¯ı’s (d. ca. 1316?) *Rays of Dawnlight*

*Outstreaming* (*T.*

*awa¯ li‘ al-anwa¯ r*). There al-Is.faha¯nı¯ admits

openly (following al-Bayd. ¯aw¯ı) that his own, post-Avicennian position

that existence is additional to essence radically departs from the

school founder’s (i.e., al-Ash‘ar¯ı’s) own doctrine. In fact al-Is.fah¯an¯ı’s

view seems to be based upon Avicenna’s position (III), namely, that

essence is extensionally broader than existence; and that existence is

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therefore not a necessary accident (*‘arad.*

*la¯ zim*) of essence, as al-T. u¯ sı¯

had held, but something extra, an add-on (*za¯ ’id*) to essence.23

What Iamgetting at is that in post-Avicennian Islamic intellectual

history, the spectrum of positions arising from Avicenna’s distinction

between essence and existence was centered around the doctrines

articulated by Shı¯‘ı¯ and Sunnı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n*, and stretched

in opposing directions by the positions of Suhraward¯ı and Mull¯a

S.

adr¯ a, two philosophers who, at least on this crucial issue, fall outside

the bounds of what could strictly be said to be the Avicennian

tradition. With respect to the distinction between essence and

existence, it is the Shı¯‘ı¯ and Sunnı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n* who propel the

Avicennian tradition forward. The realization that Sh¯ı‘¯ı and Sunn¯ı

*mutakallimu¯ n* are the true Avicennians comes as a bit of a shock,

given our expectation that philosophy and *kala¯m* are naturally and

perpetually opposed trends in Islamic intellectual history – an expectation

fed by generations of Western scholars, sometimes citing al-

Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s supposedly fatal attacks; sometimes regurgitating the stale

taxonomies presented by pre-modern Muslim doxographers who

applied to their categories *mutakallim* and *faylasu¯ f* the Aristotelian

notion that species are eternally differentiated one from the other by

essential, unchanging characteristics; and sometimes blithely superimposing

onto Islamic intellectual history a distinction between

two categories, “philosophy” and “theology,” which itself arose as

a result of the institutional separation between faculties of arts and

faculties of divinity in medieval European universities.24

the necessary of existence in itself

Let me take stock. Thus far I have focused on two issues, or rather

two clusters of philosophical issues, that illustrate how Avicenna

received and appropriated two different textual traditions. The first

textual tradition had at its core the problem of the soul’s relationship

to the body. The authors whose opinions shapedAvicenna’s own

theory were Aristotle and his late antique Greek commentators, particularly

those commentators who were involved in the Ammonian

synthesis, that is, the attempt to fold the larger project of reconciling

Aristotle and Plato into the smaller project of reconciling Aristotle

with Aristotle. The second textual tradition centered on the challenge

of determining the most basic elements of reality – thing and

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existent, essence and existence – and offering a coherent theory of

how these basic elements of reality relate to each other. The authors

whose opinions shaped Avicenna’s own response to this challenge

were the tenth-century Muslim *mutakallimu¯ n*, both Mu‘tazilı¯ and

Sunn¯ı, and the philosopher al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı.

In the first case, that of the soul, Avicenna’s theory comes across

as a natural product of the Ammonian tradition that came before.

Though Avicenna’s thought experiment of the floating man is original,

it is not an indispensable part of his theory of the soul’s separability,

a doctrine that had been worked on with great effort by previous

Ammonian philosophers. Certain aspects of Avicenna’s psychology

proved influential in subsequent Islamic intellectual history. But his

crucial insistence that *only* the rational soul survives death, and his

consequent denial of the Islamic religious doctrine of bodily resurrection,

had a short shelf-life among subsequent Muslim thinkers,

who were anxious about the degree of allegorizing exegesis such a

theory would force them to resort to, given the Qur’ ¯an’s crystal-clear

description of the physical pains and pleasures that await us in the

afterlife.

As for essence and existence, Avicenna once again took an already

existing problem (though one that was not nearly as well developed as

that concerning the soul–body relationship), namely, classical *kala¯m*

debates over whether or not – and if so, how – “thing” and “existent”

are to be distinguished. But Avicenna refashioned that old distinction

in two parallel ways: on the one hand, by abstracting existence

(*wuju¯ d*) from existent (*mawju¯ d*); and on the other hand, by abstracting

thingness (*shay’iyya*) from thing (*shay’*), and then by replacing

thingnesswith the Aristotelian-F¯ar¯abian termfor essence or quiddity

(*ma¯hiyya*). In contrast to Avicenna’s theory of the soul, the essence–

existence distinction was enormously important in post-classical

Islamic intellectual history. Subsequent Muslim thinkers found in

Avicenna’s various – and somewhat inconsistent – attempts to distinguish

between essence and existence a set of well-defined terms

as well as the central span of a spectrum of possible positions on

the issue, a spectrum bounded at either end by Suhraward¯ı’s radical

essentialism and Mull¯a S. adr¯a’s radical existentialism.

The third and final cluster of issues that I will discuss centers

around Avicenna’s most original contribution to Islamic philosophy,

namely, his distinction between (A) “thatwhich, in itself, necessarily

exists” (literally, “[the] necessary of existence in itself” – *wa¯ jib*

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*al-wuju¯ d bi-dha¯ tihi*) and (B) “that which, through another (i.e.,

through its cause), necessarily exists” (literally, “[the] necessary of

existence through another” – *wa¯ jib al-wuju¯ d bi-ghayrihi*); and his

further identification of (B) with (C) “that which, in itself, possibly

exists” (literally, “[the] possible of existence in itself” – *mumkin alwuju*

*¯ d bi-dha¯ tihi*). (I shall be using the more literal renderings – e.g.,

“necessary of existence in itself” – instead of the more elegant renderings

– “that which, in itself, necessarily exists” – because the more

literal renderings better flush out Avicenna’s philosophical choices

and dilemmas.) By Avicenna’s reckoning, God is the only being that

fits into category (A), while all other beings fit into category (B–C).

Like his distinction between essence and existence, Avicenna’s

distinction between (A) and (B–C) proved to be hugely influential in

post-classical Islamic intellectual history, and later on in this section

I shall briefly describe how subsequent *mutakallimu¯ n*, both Sunnı¯

and Sh¯ı‘¯ı, appropriated Avicenna’s distinction for their own ends and

naturalized it in their *kala¯m*. But first I must turn to Avicenna’s

sources, in order to determine the ways in which Avicenna’s distinction

between (A) and (B–C) was really innovative. For unlike

Avicenna’s theory of the soul, inwhich his original contribution was

the invention of a thought experiment devised simply to reinforce,

in theminds of advanced students, an already argued-for conclusion;

and unlike Avicenna’s distinction between essence and existence,

in which Avicenna inherited a series of rather terse articulations

from preceding Mu‘tazilı¯ and Sunnı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n* and then refashioned

them into something approaching a theory, Avicenna’s distinction

between (A) and (B–C) was made almost from scratch, using

materials that were still quite raw in the year 1000, when Avicenna

first articulated it. In this section I shall first review those sources;

discuss the reasons why Avicenna felt the need to come up with

his new distinction; go over the two major tendencies in his use

of the distinction; and finally survey the most important ways in

which later Muslim intellectuals appropriated and naturalized the

distinction.

*Sources*

The raw materials which Avicenna drew from to construct his distinction

can be found mostly in the ArabicAristotle, and particularly

in the Arabic versions of *Metaphysics*, V.5, Aristotle’s discussion of

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“the necessary” (*to anankaion* = *al-mud.t.*

*arr*), and of *De Interpretatione*,

XII–XII, Aristotle’s discussion of the modal qualifiers “necessary

[that]” (*anankaion* = *wa¯ jib*), “possible [that]” (*dunaton* =

*mumkin*) and “impossible [that]” (*adunaton* = *mumtani‘*). In *Metaphysics*,

V.5, the chapter devoted to “the necessary” in Aristotle’s

“Philosophical Lexicon,” as *Metaphysics*, V is often called, Aristotle

offers several different meanings for the necessary. The first two are

quite similar: (1) necessary in order to live or exist (e.g., “breathing”

and “eating”), and (2) necessary in order to live or exist well (e.g.,

“taking one’s medicine”). The two types of necessity are related

in that they both refer to what Aristotle elsewhere (e.g., *Physics*,

II.9) calls “hypothetical” necessity, that is, the necessity that obtains

when some goal (living; living well) is postulated or hypothesized.

According to Aristotle this type of necessity governs natural things,

whose matter is necessary not in any absolute sense (*haploˆ s*), but

only given (*ex hupotheseoˆ s*) the natural thing’s specific form and

purpose. The third kind of necessity (3) is compulsion: the taxi I was

in got a flat tire, and as a result I was compelled to miss my train.

This kind of necessity applies to intentional acts, acts that end up

being frustrated by some compelling factor.

The fourth type of necessity (4) refers to the bundle of qualities –

simplicity, immutability, eternality – that divine things possess. It

is this type of necessity that Aristotle sees as basic, as that to which

all other types of necessity ultimately refer. The fifth and final type

of necessity is complex. It can be seen to refer (at least in the Arabic

version of *Metaphysics*, V) to two types of necessity: the necessity

*possessed by* a premise that is unshakably true (5a\_), as well as the

necessity *possessed by* a conclusion that follows from two necessary

premises in a valid syllogism (5a\_\_); and also to the necessity *with*

*which* a conclusion *follows* from two necessary premises in a valid

syllogism (5b). Thus in the syllogism:

All dachshunds are dogs

All dogs are animals

All dachshunds are animals

necessity (5a\_) obtains in the two premises and necessity (5a\_\_) obtains

in the conclusion, while necessity (5b) obtains in the act of inferring

the conclusion from the premises. Put another way, necessity (5a\_)

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refers to the necessity that a cause possesses (in this case, the causes

are the premises) and necessity (5a\_\_) refers to the necessity that a

cause produces in its effect (in this case, the effect is the conclusion).

Necessity (5b), by contrast, refers to the necessity that obtains in the

cause’s act of causing or producing its effect: given the (5a\_) necessity

possessed by the cause (or the premises), the (5a\_\_) necessity of the

effect (or conclusion) follows by (5b) necessity. In a way, (5a\_) and

(5a\_\_) both refer to *necessity*, whereas (5b) refers to *necessitation*.

At the conceptual level, as opposed to the lexical or terminological

level, *Metaphysics*, V.5 provided Avicenna with most of the

raw material he needed to fashion his distinction between (A) “[the]

necessary of existence in itself” (*wa¯ jib al-wuju¯ d bi-dha¯ tihi*) and (B)

“[the] necessary of existence through another” (*wa¯ jib al-wuju¯ d bighayrihi*).

But before explaining how and why Avicenna appropriated

this material I shall first describe the terminological sources

of Avicenna’s distinction, since, as mentioned above, the term used

in the Arabic translation of the *Metaphysics* for *anankaion* (“necessary”)

is *mud.t.*

*arr* and not*wa¯ jib* as in Avicenna’s distinction. Instead,

the most likely terminological source of Avicenna’s distinction is *De*

*Interpretatione*, XII–XIII, the chapters of the *De Interpretatione* in

which Aristotle is concerned with the nature of modality. That is to

say, Aristotle wants to determine as precisely as he can what it is

we mean when we say that a proposition is necessary, possible, or

impossible; or, put another way, what it is we mean when we say that

it is necessary, possible or impossible that predicate P (e.g., “dog”)

holds of subject S (“dachshund”). Why should Aristotle want to do

this? The reason is that in the next treatise of the *Organon* Aristotle

is very concerned with the implications of necessity. In the *Prior*

*Analytics*, Aristotle begins by investigating the structure and behavior

of assertoric syllogisms, but quickly turns to the structure and

behavior of modal syllogisms, i.e., those syllogisms whose premises

and conclusion contain modal qualifiers such as “necessarily” or

“necessary [that].”

In the course of rendering *De Interpretatione*, XII–XIII into Arabic

the translator made two important lexical moves. First, he

started to use the more existential Arabic root *w-j-d* (as in *wuju¯ d*,

“existence”), instead of the more copulative *k-w-n*, to translate

Aristotle’s copulative uses of the Greek verb *einai*, “to be.” The second

move was using *w-j-b* instead of *d.*

*-r-r* to translate *anankaion*,

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“necessary.” In my opinion the move from *k-w-n* to *w-j-d* in

translating *einai* is evidence that the translator worried about

Aristotle’s uncertainty over whether possibility is one-sided (i.e.,

opposed in a contradictory way only to impossibility) or twosided

(opposed in a contradictory way to impossibility *and* to

necessity); and that the greater existential weight conveyed by

the root *w-j-d* (in contrast to the more copulative *k-w-n*) helped

the translator come down on the side of two-sided possibility.

This is because *w-j-d* appeared to be usable both as a copula

in propositions, where the logical mode *mumkin* – “possible

[that S is P]” – is the contradictory of the mode *mumtani‘* –

“impossible [that S is P]”; and as an existential signifier in descriptions

of real beings, in which the existential state *wa¯ jib* – “necessary

[of existence],” here meaning “a being which is uncaused” – is

the contradictory of the existential state *mumkin* – “possible [of

existence],” here meaning “a being which is caused.” In other words,

the translator chose *w-j-d* because that Arabic root better ensured

that *mumkin* was able to performthe dual role that Aristotle seemed

to expect of *dunaton*, as meaning both “possible” (i.e., the contradictory

of “impossible”) and “contingent” (i.e., the contradictory of

“necessary”).

As for the translator’s move from *d.*

*-r-r* to *w-j-b* in translating

*anankaion*, my sense is that whereas *d.*

*-r-r* could have conveyed

the (5a\_) and (5a\_\_) senses of necessity – that is, the necessity possessed,

respectively, by the premises and by the conclusion in a

valid syllogism – only *w-j-b* could also have conveyed the (5b) sense

of inferential necessity – of necessitation, that is. This is because

the Arabic verb *wajaba/yajibu* was the standard term one turned

to when one wanted to say that a conclusion “follows necessarily

from” its premises.

The result of these two shifts in translation patterns is that

Avicenna was provided with an Aristotelian text in which the

phrases *wa¯ jib al-wuju¯ d* (“necessary of existence”) and *mumkin*

*al-wuju¯ d* (“possible of existence”) were both prominently used.

However, the last remaining pieces of raw material – the qualifiers

*bi-dha¯ tihi* (“in itself”) and *bi-ghayrihi* (“through another”) – though

they appeared in al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s *Commentary on the “De Interpretatione,”*

seem in fact to have come to Avicenna from *kala¯m*

treatments of the problem of God’s attributes, a topic I shall turn

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to now, in my discussion of the two main problems that Avicenna

was trying to solve by coming up with his new distinction.

*Objectives*

The first problem dealtwith byAvicenna’s new distinction was: how

is a duality – conceptual, if not real – in God to be avoided? Like the

Mu‘tazil¯ıs, the Neoplatonists had insisted on a strict understanding

of God’s oneness – as simplicity, and not merely as uniqueness.

Yet the efforts by commentators of the Ammonian synthesis to reconcile

Plato’s and Aristotle’s theories of God’s causality ultimately

produced a God who was a composite of efficient causality and final

causality. God as efficient cause was either the Demiurge of Plato’s

*Timaeus*, who creates the world out of matter but in view of the

transcendent Forms; or it was the Neoplatonists’ One, who is the

original source of the downward procession (*proo¨dos*) of existence (*to*

*einai*) to each thing in the universe. God as final cause was either the

Unmoved Mover of Aristotle’s *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, who serves

as a goal, impelling the eternal circular motion of the heavens; or it

was the Neoplatonists’ Good, who is the ultimate destination of the

upward reversion (*epistrophˆe*) of each thing toward the well-being (*to*

*eu einai*) that is peculiar to its species. For Avicenna it was simply

not good enough to assert, as some Greek Neoplatonists had, that in

God no *real* duality is entailed by his being both an efficient cause

and a final cause, and that what appears to us to be a *conceptual*

duality between God’s two causal roles is a reflection of the fact that

human minds are just too feeble to apprehend the real identity of

efficient and final causality in God. Avicenna’s discomfort with this

dodge may have been exacerbated by the fact that the Ammonians

had actually papered over a more fundamental disjunction. After all,

God’s final causality and his efficient causality not only served as

explanations of the ways inwhich God causes the universe, they also

expressed in what were then seen as scientific terms the two basic

qualities that God should possess: on the one hand being utterly separate

from and transcendent of the world (a quality more compatible

with God’s being a final cause), and on the other hand being creatively

involved with and productive of the world (a quality more

compatible with God’s being an efficient cause).

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Avicenna was able to take a fresh approach to this first challenge

because by his time the Ammonian synthesis had pretty much run

out of steam. By this I mean that Avicenna, born and raised and

educated at the periphery of the Islamic world, had no professional

teachers to instill in him the hermeneutical commitments of the

Ammonian synthesis. As a result Avicenna felt under little obligation

to adhere to the original interpretive premises that had caused

earlier Ammonians to cut philosophical corners in order to harmonize

Plato and Aristotle – or more specifically, in order to advance

the Ammonian project of folding the greater harmony into the lesser

harmony. These hermeneutical commitments were still operative

in works as recent as those of Avicenna’s predecessor al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, who

had received his philosophical education in the Aristotelian school

in metropolitan Baghdad.25

Because of Avicenna’s peripheral education – because he was

almost entirely self-educated, in fact – he inherited the old set of

problems created by the Ammonian synthesis yet without any motivation

to keep him working within its rules; without any motivation,

that is, to keep him from simply discarding or moving beyond

those old Ammonian problems. True, some of the problems Avicenna

inherited had already been solved within the context of the

Ammonian synthesis, a prominent example being the question of

the soul’s relationship to the body, as I discussed earlier. But the

conceptual duality entailed by God’s being both a final and efficient

cause remained an unsolved problem.26

The way that Avicenna side-stepped the Ammonians’ commitment

to God’s troublesome combination of efficient and final causality

was to propose a new formula to describe God: “[the] necessary of

existence in itself.” Avicenna’s new formula enjoyed the enormous

advantage of being syntactically amphibolous. That is to say, “necessary

of existence in itself” can be construed both intransitively and

transitively, and therefore can be understood as referring to a being

who is transcendent of the world and productive of it at the same

time. Understood intransitively, Avicenna’s God satisfies the criteria

of Aristotle’s type (4) necessity, when type (4) necessity is viewed

as the grab-bag of intransitive divine qualities, such as simplicity,

immutability, and eternality; as well as the criteria ofAristotle’s type

(5a\_) necessity, that is, the necessity with which a predicate holds

of a subject, when that subject-predicate combination is viewed in

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itself, as a stand-alone proposition. Understood transitively,

Avicenna’s God also satisfies the criteria of Aristotle’s type (4) necessity,

when type (4) necessity is understood as the basic necessity from

which all other necessities derive; as well as the criteria of Aristotle’s

type (5a\_) necessity, the necessity with which a predicate holds of a

subject, when that subject-predicate combination is viewed not as

a stand-alone proposition but rather as a premise in a syllogism –

when it is viewed, in other words, as productive of the necessity of a

conclusion. And in this latter, transitive case, the effect which is produced

corresponds to Aristotle’s (5a\_\_) necessity, the necessity that a

conclusion possesses but which is produced by the (5a\_) necessity of

the premises. This effect of the transitive necessary of existence in

itself is the necessary of existence through another.

The second problem that Avicenna’s new distinction helped to

solve was: how is one to distinguish between God and other eternal

things? The elaborate pleromas constructed by various Neoplatonic

thinkers – cosmologies that reached their peak (or depth) of complexity

in the works of Proclus – cried out for a simple and basic

way to differentiate the First Cause from the monads and henads

and gods and intellects all crowding round it. Amongst the Sunn¯ı

*mutakallimu¯ n*, the problemwas expressed in terms of finding a way

to distinguish between God’s self (*dha¯ t*) and God’s eternal attributes

(*s.*

*if ¯ at*), such as his knowledge (*‘ilm*), power (*qudra*), and life (*h.*

*aya¯ t*).

The Sunn¯ıs had insisted on the reality, eternality, and distinctiveness

of the divine attributes. This was in contrast to the Mu‘tazil¯ıs,

who refused to grant the divine attributes any separate reality, arguing

that while the attributes can be distinguished from each other

and fromGod’s self (*dha¯ t*) at a purely conceptual level, in reality they

are all identical to God’s self. By the Mu‘tazil¯ıs’ reckoning, a cluster

of eternal, real, and distinct attributes violated Islam’s cardinal tenet

of God’s oneness (*tawh. ¯ıd*). If, for example, the divine attributes were

really distinct from God’s self, then there would be a plurality of eternal

entities, and God’s oneness, understood as his *uniqueness*, would

be infringed upon. If, on the other hand, the divine attributes were

not really separate from God’s self but were instead containedwithin

it, yet were still distinct enough to be really differentiated one from

the other, then God’s oneness, understood as his *simplicity*, would

be violated. Solving this second problem – finding a watertight way

to distinguish between God and other eternal things – was clearly in

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Avicenna’s mind when he composed his first philosophical treatise,

which I shall discuss in the next subsection.

*Evolution*

How did the various ways in which Avicenna articulated, justified,

and employed his distinction between (A) “necessary of existence

in itself,” and (B) “necessary of existence through another” – (C)

“possible of existence in itself,” evolve over his career? Is there as

much evidence of inconsistency and uncertainty as there was with

his distinction between essence and existence? The answer to the

second question is no: the ways Avicenna expressed, argued for and

employed his distinction between (A) and (B–C) are more coherent –

and hence his overall theory is less underdetermined – than the

ways in which he expressed, argued for, and employed his distinction

between essence and existence. Nevertheless, in answer to the

first question, two trends in his approach to the distinction between

(A) and (B–C) can be detected, trends that are clearly distinct at the

beginning of his career but which became increasingly interwoven

as his career progressed.

Avicenna’s distinction between (A) and (B–C) first appears in his

earliest philosophical *summa*, the *Philosophy for ‘Aru¯ d. ı¯* (*al-H. ikma*

*al-‘Aru¯ d. iyya*), dating from around 1001, when Avicenna was just

twenty-one years old, and commissioned by a neighbor of his in

Bukh¯ar¯a. In that work, most of which remains unedited, Avicenna

introduces two ways of distinguishing between different types of

necessary existence: *necessary of existence in itself* as opposed to

*necessary of existence through another*; and *necessary of existence*

*at all times* as opposed to *necessary of existence at some time and*

*not at other times*. Avicenna plumps for the former way of distinguishing

between different types of necessary existence, because he

thinks the “in itself” vs. “through another” method will better warrant

an identification of the necessary of existence in itself with the

*uncaused* and the necessary of existence through another with the

*caused* than the “at all times” vs. “at some times and not other

times” method will.

The reason why Avicenna makes this choice is that he has inmind

the second major challenge discussed in the previous subsection,

namely, finding some way to distinguish between God and other

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eternal things, or, put another way, finding some way to distinguish

between something eternal which is uncaused and something eternal

which is caused. In Avicenna’s case, the eternal things that are

caused consist in the celestial spheres, the celestial souls that motivate

them, and the celestial intellects whose serene (and motionless)

eternality serves as the object of the celestial souls’ desire. For Neoplatonists

such as Proclus, as mentioned above, this category (eternal

but caused) comprises the full complement of gods, henads, monads,

and intellects. For the Sunnı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n*, “eternal but caused”

(or better, “eternal but not uncaused”) applies to the eternal divine

attributes, each of whose individual reality was distinct enough from

God’s self to raise warning flags about the consequences of creating a

pleroma of eternal and divine – though not causally self-sufficient –

things. Since the problem facing Avicenna revolved around differentiating

between eternal things, the “necessary at all times” vs.

“necessary sometimes” distinction was of little help, since the qualifier

“at all times” covers all eternal things, instead of distinguishing

between them.

By contrast, the “in itself” vs. “through another” method of distinguishing

between types of necessary existence was better equipped

to ensure the distinctness of God, the only uncaused being, from

*all* caused beings, be they eternal (such as the celestial spheres,

souls, or intellects) or temporally originated (such as you or I). In

the *Philosophy for ‘Aru¯ d. ı¯* Avicenna justified his identification of

the necessary of existence in itself with the uncaused, and his identification

of the necessary of existence through another with the

caused, by asserting that the necessary of existence in itself, unlike

the necessary of existence through another, is not divisible into

two modes or states (*h.*

*a¯ latayni*). His reasoning was that whatever

is divisible into two modes or states will be a composite of those

two modes or states, and since every composite requires a composer

and is therefore caused, everything divisible into two modes

or states will be caused. By contrast, everything simple – here meaning

not even conceptually divisible – will be uncaused. But what

do the two modes or states refer to? Here Avicenna is unclear. The

two modes or states could refer to (1) the fact that a being which

is necessary of existence through another is *also* possible of existence

in itself, and will therefore be divisible into those two modes

of being (i.e., B *and* C). This is in contrast to a being which is

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necessary of existence in itself, which is only ever conceivable as

being necessary of existence in itself (i.e., only A), and hence is indivisible

into two modes of being. The problemwith this interpretation

is that Avicenna also asserts in this passage that whatever is subject

to change will possess neither mode in itself. But whatever is necessary

of existence through another and possible of existence through

itself *does* possess one of those two states in itself, namely, being

possible of existence.

Alternatively, the two modes or states could refer to (2) the state

of nonexistence and existence which obtain in the necessary of existence

through another, with nonexistence obtaining before the necessary

of existence through another comes into being and also after it

passes away, and existence obtainingwhile the necessary of existence

through another actually exists. The problem with this interpretation

is that it cannot account for beings which are caused but also

eternal, since they are never nonexistent and hence never divisible

into the states of nonexistence and existence. A final alternative is

that the two modes or states into which the necessary of existence

through another is divisible refer to (3) the state of potentiality (or

imperfection) and the state of actuality (or perfection) that simultaneously

obtain in something subject to change. After all, a log is

conceptually divisible into two states: actuality (i.e., as actual wood)

and potentiality (i.e., as potential fire). This interpretation works

a bit better than interpretation (2) in accounting for eternal things

which are caused, for even though the celestial spheres are never

nonexistent, they are subject to change and therefore exhibit potentiality

(they move in an eternal circular motion); and even though

the celestial souls are never nonexistent, they are perfectible (they

yearn to be assimilated into the celestial intellects that are paired

with them). Nevertheless, interpretation (3) still fails to account for

the celestial intellects, which by Avicenna’s reckoning are all fully

actual and perfect, uninfected by any potentiality or imperfection

whatsoever. The result is that interpretation (3) will fail to account

for *all* eternal but caused things.

Perhaps because of his frustration at not coming up with a satisfactory

way to justify his assertion that the necessary of existence

through another will be divisible into two modes or states

and therefore be caused, Avicenna changed tack entirely in his next

work, the *Origin and Destination* (*al-Mabda’ wa-al-ma‘a¯d*), written

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around 1013, when he was 33 or so. In contrast to the *Philosophy for*

*‘Aru¯ d. ı¯*, where Avicenna begins with a distinction between the necessary

of existence in itself and the necessary of existence through

another, and then moves to identify the necessary of existence

through another with the possible of existence in itself, Avicenna

starts his discussion in the *Origin and Destination* by distinguishing

the necessary of existence and the possible of existence, and only

after doing that moves on to identify the possible of existence with

the necessary of existence through another. What advantage did this

new approach give to Avicenna? How did it provide a way for him

to unblock the logjam that had frustrated him in the *Philosophy for*

*‘Aru¯ d. ı¯*?

By 1013, when he wrote the *Origin and Destination*, Avicenna

apparently felt that the distinction between the necessary of existence

and the possible of existence was sufficiently intuitive that he

could simply assert that the necessary of existence is *by definition*

that whose nonexistence is inconceivable, whereas the possible of

existence is *by definition* that whose nonexistence is conceivable.

(The impossible of existence, which we need not worry about too

much, is *by definition* that whose existence is inconceivable.) Once

he had laid out this assumed basis for the distinction, Avicenna then

claimed that we can conceive of the existence of something which is

possible of existence only in the context of a relation which that possibly

existent thing has, namely, the relation it has with its cause. It

is in virtue of this relation with its cause, Avicenna asserts, that the

possible of existence is *also* necessary of existence through another;

in itself – that is, conceived of in isolation from its relation to its

cause – it remains only possible of existence.

The advantage of the *Origin and Destination*’s approach to the

distinction is that in it Avicenna felt under no obligation to argue

that the causedness of the necessary of existence through another

results from its being composed of two modes or states, and this

in turn freed him from having to explain precisely what those two

modes or statesmight be. In the *Origin and Destination*, the causedness

of the possible of existence stems from its relation to its cause,

a relation whose nonexistence is inconceivable once we posit the

actual existence of something which is possible of existence. On the

other hand, the *Origin and Destination*’s approach could be faulted

for assuming too much – for assuming, that is, that everyone would

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find its ontological or definitional approach to the distinction to be

so intuitive that the distinction could now bear all the cosmological

weight that would be piled on top of it. After all, the distinction did

serve as the axis of Avicenna’s analysis of all reality in the universe.

In his middle period, the period when he wrote his greatest philosophical

work, *The Healing*, Avicenna continued to appeal to the

*Origin and Destination*’s definitional, assumed basis for his distinction.

But in the *Metaphysics* of *The Healing*, a crucial thought seems

to have occurred to him. As discussed above, Avicenna argues in

*Metaphysics* 1.5 that thing and existent – and by implication, essence

and existence – are extensionally identical but intensionally distinct.

Every thing will also be an existent, and every existent will also be a

thing, but to be a thing and to be an existent have different meanings.

In the very next chapter, *Metaphysics* 1.6, Avicenna distinguishes

between the necessary of existence, the possible of existence, and

the impossible of existence, following the definitional approach he

took in the *Origin and Destination*, although the phrases he uses are

slightly different. Slightly later on in this chapter, Avicenna introduces

the term *ma¯hiyya*, essence, into the discussion: that whose

essence is insufficient for it to exist will be caused, whereas that

whose essence is sufficient for it to exist will be uncaused. The new

distinction Avicenna draws here is less important for what it lays

out than for what it represents, because it is here, I believe, that

it occurs to Avicenna to use his essence vs. existence distinction

to provide the conceptual divisibility – and hence compositeness,

and hence causedness – of any being that is necessary of existence

through another and possible of existence in itself, a conceptual divisibility

that he had groped for unsuccessfully twenty-five years earlier

in the *Philosophy for ‘Aru¯ d. ı¯*.

In fact it is only toward the end of the *Metaphysics* of *The Healing*

that Avicenna actually appeals to the essence vs. existence distinction

in this way. In *Metaphysics* 8.4, a chapter devoted to proving

God’s existence as well as his uniqueness, Avicenna argues that God

is the only being that is necessary of existence in itself because only

God is not divisible into essence and existence, unlike all other

beings, which are composites of essence and existence, and hence

caused, and hence merely necessary of existence through another

and possible of existence in themselves. In God, Avicenna asserts,

essence and existence are intensionally as well as extensionally

identical: God’s essence refers to nothing other than his existence.

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Although this appears on the surface to be a crucial move, and despite

the fact that later Muslim thinkers were intensely preoccupied with

determining the extent to which essence and existence really were

identical in God, Avicenna’s new argument, at least in the context

of the *Metaphysics* of *The Healing*, is not an indispensable component

of his general discussion there of the distinction between

the necessary of existence in itself and the possible of existence in

itself. This is because, as I already mentioned, that general discussion

is still framed in the terms Avicenna first set out in the *Origin*

*and Destination*, namely, that the basis for the distinction was

definitional.

In his last major work, the *Pointers and Reminders*, the two trends

inAvicenna’s articulation, justification, and use of the distinction all

come together in a terse synthesis. As he had in the *Metaphysics* of

*The Healing*, Avicenna discusses the distinction between necessary

and possible existence very soon after he discusses the distinction

between essence and existence. But in the *Metaphysics* of *The Healing*,

Avicenna’s general discussions of essence and existence (1.5)

and of necessary, possible, and impossible existence (1.6) were separated

by seven long sections from his proofs of God’s existence and

of God’s uniqueness as the only being that is necessary of existence

in itself (8.4). In the *Pointers and Reminders*, by contrast, Avicenna

moves straight from his discussions of essence and existence and

of necessary, possible, and impossible existence (interspersed with

some comments on the different categories of causes) to his proofs of

God’s existence and of God’s uniqueness. As a result the distinction

between essence and existence is pressed into immediate service,

now playing a fundamental role in the proofs of God’s existence and

of his uniqueness as the only being that is necessary of existence in

itself.

*Legacy*

As I mentioned above, Avicenna’s distinction between essence and

existence is more underdetermined, more variously interpretable,

than his distinction between the necessary of existence in itself and

the necessary of existence through another – possible of existence

in itself. This is not to say that the latter distinction was passed

on to subsequent thinkers in a fully crystallized form. On the contrary,

it created a number of philosophical problems, opportunities,

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and challenges to subsequent *mutakallimu¯ n*. One problem was that

God’s being necessary of existencemight imply a conceptual duality

in him, since there is a sense in which “necessary of existence” can

be understood as a species (albeit a species with only one individual

member) whose genus is “existent” (or “substance”) and whose

specific difference is “necessary.” Just as the species “human” is

notionally divisible into – and hence a composite of – the genus

“animal” and the specific difference “rational,” so too the species

“necessary of existence” will be notionally divisible – and hence a

composite of – the genus “existent” (or “substance”) and the specific

difference “necessary.”27 But once he was understood as a composite,

God no longer had any basis – any non-definitional basis, that is –

to claim sole occupancy of the category “uncaused being.” A second

problem is, should God’s existence be understood as an attribute

(*s.*

*ifa*) which is somehow additional to his self or essence, in the way

that Sunnı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n* understood God’s attributes of knowledge

(*‘ilm*), power (*qudra*) and life (*h.*

*aya¯ t*)? Should God’s existence be seen

instead as an accident of – and thus caused by – his essence? Or should

God’s essence and existence be taken to be wholly identical?28

Athird loose end is thatAvicenna seems to take for granted that (B)

“necessary of existence through another” and (C) “possible of existence

in itself” are convertible: that every existent that is (B) will

also be (C), and vice versa. The convertibility of (B) and (C) is certainly

plausible, even intuitive, in the case of concrete, extramental

existents (*mawju¯ da¯ t fı¯ al-a‘ya¯n*). But what about mental existents

(*mawju¯ da¯ t fı¯ al-dhihn*)? The answer I give will depend on other

interpretive commitments I have made. If, for example, my overriding

concern is to uphold Avicenna’s position (I) on essence and

existence – that essence and existence are intensionally distinct but

extensionally identical – then I shall tend to maintain that the existence

of an essence in the mind deserves to be called “existence”

just as much as the existence of an essence in the concrete, extramental

world does. (This is because I want to avoid holding the

Mu‘tazilite position that essences in the mind can be construed as

non-existent). And this tendency will further lead me in the direction

of assuming that Avicenna’s distinction between (A) “necessary

of existence in itself” and (B–C) “necessary of existence through

another” – “possible of existence in itself” will be just as applicable

to mental beings as it is to concrete existence. An important question

arises, however: what is the cause that makes a mental being

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“necessary of existence through another”? If the mental being is a

universal such as “Horse” or “Cat,” then the active intellect seems

the likeliest candidate to serve in the role of cause, since it is the

source of all forms in the sublunary world: it is the source of substantial

forms in the case of concrete beings such as the individuals

*this horse* and *that cat*, and it is the source of intelligible forms in the

case of mental beings such as the universals “Horse” and “Cat.” But

what about “Unicorn” and “Phoenix,” which are universals that it

is possible to conceive of, and which thus possess mental existence,

yet which are unrealizable as concrete, extramental beings – as the

individuals *this unicorn* or *that phoenix*? A further step leads us to

the problematic status of “Pentagonal House” (to use an example

Avicenna cites in a different context), which is a universal that it is

possible to conceive of, and which thus possesses mental existence,

but which (unlike “Unicorn” or “Phoenix”) might well exist someday

as a concrete, extramental being – as the individual *this pentagonal*

*house* – even though up to now (at least as far as Avicenna was

concerned) such a house has never existed concretely.

In the case of mental beings that are either unrealizable or as yet

unrealized in the concrete world – mental beings such as “Unicorn,”

“Phoenix,” or “Pentagonal House” – it is harder to determine which

cause makes them “necessary of existence through another.” Perhaps

the cause is still the active intellect; if that is so, the individuals

*this unicorn* and *that phoenix* will be unrealizable as concrete

beings (and *this pentagonal house* is as yet unrealized as a

concrete being) simply because the sublunary world happens to contain

no matter that is suitably disposed to receive those forms from

the active intellect. However, in the case of the intelligible forms

“Unicorn,” “Phoenix,” or “Pentagonal House,” as opposed to the

substantial forms that would inhere in *this unicorn* or *that phoenix*

or *this pentagonal house*, there *are* suitably disposed receptacles –

human intellects – that can and do receive what issues from the

Active Intellect. Alternatively, one might reasonably claim that in

the case of “Unicorn,” “Phoenix,” and “Pentagonal House,” it is

merely one of my soul’s internal senses that serves as the cause that

makes them “necessary of existence through another” – my faculty

of “rational imagination”, say, which can separate, juggle, and combine

different pieces of abstracted sense data.29 Of course, if I am

not so committed to promoting Avicenna’s position (I) on essence

and existence, I shall be tempted to avoid all the foregoing problems

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by clearly restricting the distinction between (A) and (B–C) to concrete,

extramental beings.30 But then I am still left with the original

problem: (B) and (C) will not be convertible, since there will be as

yet unrealized entities – “Pentagonal House,” for example – that are

possible of existence in themselves but that are not (yet) necessary

of existence through another.

Despite this problem, Avicenna’s analysis of God as the necessary

of existence presented a golden opportunity to Sunnı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n*

struggling with the troublesome consequences of their theory that

God’s attributes were, in some real sense, distinct from God’s self.

Before Avicenna came along, Sunnı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n* had treated eternality

(*qidam*) as the most important meta-attribute – the kind

of attribute that is predicable both of God’s self *and* of God’s

attributes. (This position emerged because the Sunn¯ıs, in contrast to

the Mu‘tazil¯ıs, were committed to the traditionalist notion that the

Qur’ ¯an, conceived of as God’s attribute of speech, was not created,

and hence was eternal.) But if all – or even some – of God’s attributes

are eternal, then a risk arose of seeming to allow for a multiplicity

of uncreated, eternal things, which in turn infringed upon God’s

uniqueness as the sole possessor of eternality, that ultimate criterion

of divinity which set him apart from all other beings, which are

temporally originated (*muh. dath*).

The post-Avicennian Sunnı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n* realized that necessity

of existence could also be conceived of as a meta-attribute, and one

with fewer problematic implications than eternality. God’s self is

necessary of existence, as are God’s attributes; yet the attributes

are not necessary of existence in themselves, since they are merely

attributes and thus, strictly speaking, not “selves” but only predicated

of selves. Instead, God’s attributes are necessary of existence

in (or with – the Arabic preposition *bi-*means both) *his* self.31 Other

Sunnı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n* realized that necessity of existence could be

construed as a mode of the copula that bound the attribute (understood

as a predicate) to God’s self (understood as subject).32

Any *mutakallim*, Sunn¯ı or Sh¯ı‘¯ı, interested in taking up

Avicenna’s new distinction still faced one crucial challenge. The

Qur’ ¯an describes God as possessing not only the attribute of causal

power (*qudra*), but also the attribute of will (*ira¯da*). One theme that

runs through much of the first part of Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s *Incoherence of*

*the Philosophers* is that Avicenna’s conception of the relationship

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between God and the world – a relationship between a being which

is necessary of existence in itself, and all other beings, which are

necessary of existence through another – robbed God of any true

agency. It is not enough, according to al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, to conceive of God

merely as a cause; we must also conceive of God as an agent and

thereby make some room for God’s will. Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı reckoned that

Avicenna expected too much from Muslim intellectuals, by forcing

them in effect to reduce all the names and acts of God so clearly

and powerfully described in the Qur’ ¯an to one single, simple name –

the necessary of existence in itself – and to one single, simple act –

self-intellection. What would be left of Islamic doctrine after such a

radical reduction?

In particular, Avicenna’s conception of the relationship between

God and the world entailed the denial of God’s most important

act, namely, his having created the world at some moment in the

past. This is because Avicenna’s distinction between the necessary

of existence in itself and the necessary of existence through another

was expressly designed *not* to map onto the *mutakallimu¯ n*’s distinction

between the eternal (*qad¯ım*) and the temporally originated

(*muh. dath*). Remember that one of Avicenna’s objectives was that his

new distinction would be able to differentiate between an uncaused

being – God – and all other, caused beings, eternal *or* temporally

originated.

The balancing act that preoccupied post-Avicennian *mutakallimu*

*¯ n*, both Sunnı¯ and Shı¯‘ı¯, was to make good use of Avicenna’s

compelling and innovative analysis of God as the only being which

is necessary of existence in itself, while at the same time ensuring

that they had not thereby committed themselves to the idea that God

necessitated the world’s existence. That is to say, the Sunn¯ı and Sh¯ı‘¯ı

*mutakallimu¯ n* were entirely comfortable appropriating and naturalizing

Avicenna’s analysis of God as the necessary of existence in

itself, as long as that formula was understood in an intransitive and

not a transitive way: it should point to God’s transcendence of and

separateness from the world, but not indicate the manner in which

God was causally involved with the world. The *mutakallimu¯ n* felt

that Avicenna’s distinction was useful because it provided the basis

for an excellent proof of God’s existence, and more generally because

it provided what appeared to be a watertight method of differentiating

between God’s existence and the world’s existence. But as an analysis

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of the*way* God causes the world’s existence, it required serious qualification,

since it could be taken to imply that God’s causation of the

world was no more than an involuntary act of necessitation, rather

than a voluntary act of agency.

At first glance, then, one of the great challenges of naturalization

facing the Sunnı¯ and Shı¯‘ı¯ *mutakallimu¯ n* of the post-Avicennian era

was to find some way to avoid throwing out the baby – the idea that

God is the only being that is necessary of existence in itself – when

they threw out the bathwater – the idea that God eternally necessitates

the world’s (eternal) existence. In fact, this was done with relative

ease. The Sunn¯ı-M¯atur¯ıd¯ı *mutakallim* al-Nasaf¯ı (d. 1114–15),

for example, incorporated Avicenna’s distinction into a section of

his *Manifesto of the Proofs* in which the compositeness of all beings

other than God – their being composed of motion and rest, or of

substance and accident – point to their *not* being necessary of existence

in themselves.33 And the Sh¯ı‘¯ı *mutakallim¯ un* H.

ill¯ı (d. 1326)

and La¯hı¯jı¯ (d. 1661) in their comments on al-T. u¯ sı¯’s*Outline ofDogma*

(*Tajrı¯d al-i‘tiqa¯d*, also known as*Outline ofKala¯m*– *Tajrı¯d al-kala¯m*),

both insist that asserting that God is necessary of existence in itself

does not entail God’s necessitation (*ı¯ja¯b*) of the world’s existence.34

T.

u¯ sı¯ himself had earlier tried to interpret Avicenna’s God as only an

efficient cause and not a final cause as well, probably because the

efficient cause (*al-‘illa al-fa¯ ‘iliyya*) seemed the closest of Aristotle’s

four causes (the efficient, final, formal, and material) to the idea of

“agent” (*fa¯ ‘il*), and thus most easily naturalized into a philosophical

discourse in which God acts with will.35

Subsequent chapters in this volume on metaphysics and psychology

will treat the issues introduced here in a way more congenial

to those whose interest in Avicenna’s ideas is solely (or primarily)

philosophical. My goal in this chapter has been to locate Avicenna

in the *history* of philosophy: to unearth the philosophical challenges

that most demanded Avicenna’s attention; to describe the spectrum

of responses open to him at that time, given the raw materials he

probably had in front of him; and to explain why he chose one

option over another. Avicenna, it turns out, is situated at the end

of one period of synthesis – the Ammonian synthesis – and at the

beginning of another, a new synthesis of Avicenna’s metaphysics

and Muslimdoctrine. A daunting amount of scholarly work remains

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to be done on the 800-year history of efforts by post-Avicennian

*mutakallimu¯ n* to appropriate and naturalizeAvicenna’smetaphysics

into their *kala¯m*.36 But I hope that I have given a hint here of the richness

of the sources to bemined, and made the beginnings of a case for

viewing these *mutakallimu¯ n* – Sunnı¯ as well as Shı¯‘ı¯ – as the torchbearers

of the Avicennian tradition in Islamic intellectual history.

notes

1 See Gohlman’s remarks in his edition and translation of Avicenna,

Gohlman [91], 13, 91–113, and 143–52; G. C. Anawati, *Mu’allafa¯ t Ibn*

*S¯ın¯ a* (Cairo: 1950); and Y. Mahdav¯ı, *Fihrist-i Mus.*

*annafa¯ t-i Ibn-i Sı¯na¯*

(Tehran: 1954). Bibliographies of Avicenna’s works can also be found in

Janssens [95] andDaiber [1]; a chronology of the major works is proposed

by Gutas [93]. Avicenna’s major works include *The Healing* (*al-Shifa¯ ’*),

covering the exact sciences, logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics;

*The Salvation* (*al-Naja¯ t*), a summary drawn from *The Healing* and from

a number of Avicenna’s earlier works; and *The Pointers and Reminders*

(*al-Isha¯ ra¯ t wa-al-tanbiha¯ t*), a late work composed for his advanced students

and requiring a great deal of decompression, and which was consequently

much commented upon by subsequent Muslim thinkers.

2 At least until a number of twentieth-century Arab intellectuals made

Averroes a hero of Arab (or more generally, Muslim) rationalism; on this

see A. von Ku‥ gelgen, *Averroes und die arabische Moderne: Ansa¨ tze zu*

*einer Neubegru¨ ndung des Rationalismus im Islam* (Leiden: 1994).

3 On the textual transmission of Avicenna’s works into Latin, see

d’Alverny [248]; for a study of how a number of Avicenna’s psychological

theories were received and appropriated by Latin thinkers, see

now Hasse [251].

4 I chose these three issues not only because they are basic but because

I have worked at length on them already and am therefore confident of

my analysis. Readers interested in seeing a detailed treatment of them,

as well as textual evidence supporting my views, should consult Wisnovsky

[105].

5 Avicenna, *Autobiography*, 18.4 (English trans. at Gohlman [91], 19).

6 See D. Gutas, “Avicenna’s*Madhhab* with an Appendix on the Question

of the Date of his Birth,” *Quaderni di studi arabi* 5–6 (1987–8), 323–36.

7 Avicenna, *Autobiography* 22.6–7 and 24.6–7 (English trans. at Gohlman

[91], 23 and 25); see also Ibn Khallika¯n,*Wafaya¯ t al-a‘ya¯nwa-anba¯ ’ abna¯ ’*

*al-zama¯n*, ed. M. ‘Abd al-H. amı¯d, 6 vols. (Cairo: 1949), vol. I [#182],

420.10–11.

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8 Avicenna, *Autobiography*, in Gohlman [91], 36.8–38.2 (my trans.).

9 See Avicenna, *al-Naj ¯ at*, ed. M. S.

. al-Kurd¯ı (Cairo: 1913), 300.2–310.7

(English trans. at Avicenna [205], 56–64); Avicenna, *Kita¯b al-shifa¯ ’:*

*t.*

*abı¯‘iyya¯ t (6): al-nafs*, ed. F. Rahman (as *Avicenna’s “De Anima”:*

*Arabic Text*) (Oxford: 1959), 5.3–5.5.4, 223.11–234.11; French trans. J.

Bakosˇ (as *Psychologie d’Ibn Sı¯na¯ (Avicenne) d’apre`s son oeuvre ash-*

*Shifa¯ ’*) (Prague: 1956), 158–66; Avicenna, *Liber de Anima seu Sextus*

*de Naturalibus* (medieval Latin trans.), ed. S. van Riet, 2 vols. (Leiden:

1968 and 1972), 105.40–126.26.

10 For a fuller discussion of the “lesser” and “greater” harmonies see

Wisnovsky [105].

11 OnPhiloponus Arabus seeR.Wisnovsky, “Yah.

y¯a al-Nah.w¯ı (John Philoponus),”

in *Encyclopedia of Islam* [16], vol. XI, 251–3.

12 On the complex relationship between the *Theology of Aristotle* and the

*Enneads*, see now P. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical*

*Study of the “Theology of Aristotle”* (London: 2003).

13 This distinction is stated most canonically by Ammonius’ student

Asclepius, *In Metaph*. [= *CAG* VI 2] 5.1 (*ad* 1013a17), 305.2–17. See

Wisnovsky [232] for a discussion of the history of this exegetical

trend.

14 E.g., Aristotle, *De Anima*, I.4, 408b18–19; *De Anima*, II.1, 413a3–9;

*De Anima*, III.4, 429a22–5; *Parts of Animals*, I.1, 641a32–641b10; *GA*,

II.3, 736b28–30; *Metaphysics*, VI.1, 1026a5–6; and *Metaphysics*, XII.3,

1070a24–6.

15 *Al-Shifa¯ ’: kita¯b al-nafs* 1.1, 15.17–16.17 (medieval Latin trans., ed. van

Riet, 36.43–37.68; French trans. by Bakoˇs, 12–13).

16 On Avicenna’s floating man, and on its relation to Descartes’ *cogito*,

see Marmura [214] and Druart [89], who refer to earlier works. See also

below, chapter 15.

17 For another example of how Avicenna can be fruitfully compared with

another philosopher of theAmmonian synthesis, seeA. Stone, “Simplicius

and Avicenna on the essential corporeity of material substance,”

in Wisnovsky [104], 73–130.

18 On this problem generally, see Wisnovsky [231].

19 Qur’ ¯an, 16:40: “Our statement to a thing, when we wish it [to be], consists

merely in our saying to it ‘Be!’, and then it is” (*inna-ma¯ qawluna¯*

*li-shay’in idha¯ aradna¯hu an naqu¯ la lahu kun fa-yaku¯ nu*); and 36:82:

“His command, when he wishes a thing [to be], is merely that he say

‘Be!’ and then it is” (*inna-ma¯ amruhu idha¯ ara¯da shay’an an yaqu¯ la*

*kun fa-yaku¯ nu*).

20 Nas.ı¯r al-Dı¯n al-T. u¯ sı¯, *Sharh. al-isha¯ ra¯ t*, in *Sharh. ay al-isha¯ ra¯ t* (Qom:

1983 or 1984), 189.16–19 (inside box on the page).

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21 Fakhr al-Dı¯n al-Ra¯zı¯, *Sharh. al-Isha¯ ra¯ t*, in *Sharh. ay al-isha¯ ra¯ t*, 192.5–13

(outside box).

22 Sa‘d al-Dı¯n al-Tafta¯za¯nı¯, *Sharh. al-‘aqa¯ ’id al-nasafiyya* (Cairo: 1916),

16.2–17.3 (top part of inside box); trans. E. Elder, *A Commentary on*

*the Creed of Islam* (New York: 1950), 11–12.

23 Mah.m¯ ud al-Is.fah¯an¯ı, *Mat.*

*¯ ali‘ al-anz. ¯ ar sharh. t.*

*awa¯ li‘ al-anwa¯ r* (Cairo:

1902), 39–41; English trans. by E. Calverley and J. Pollock,*Nature,Man*

*and God in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: 2002), vol. I, 192–7.

24 In fact many historians of medieval European thought are now actively

engaged in re-examining the traditional distinction between philosophy

and theology; see the articles contained in J. Aertsen and A. Speer,

eds.,*Was ist Philosophie imMittelalter? Akten des X. Internationalen*

*Kongresses fu¨ r mittelalterliche Philosophie* (Berlin: 1998).

25 That al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı saw himself as part of the tradition of the Ammonian

synthesis is evident throughout his treatise *On the Harmony between*

*the Opinions of the Two Philosophers, Plato the Divine and Aristotle*,

but particularly in his claim that Ammonius’ arguments about

God’s being both an efficient and final cause were so well known that

they did not require citation: al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯, *Kita¯b al-jam‘ bayna ra’yay alh.*

*ak¯ımayni Afl ¯ at.*

*¯ un al-il ¯ ah¯ı wa-Arist.*

*u¯ t.a¯ lı¯s*, ed. F. Dieterici, *Alfa¯ ra¯bı¯’s*

*philosophische Abhandlungen* (Leiden: 1890), 24.24–25.1.

26 On the history of this issue see Wisnovsky [233].

27 E.g., al-Shahrast ¯an¯ı, *Kit ¯ ab al-mus.*

*a¯ ra‘a*, ed. W. Madelung and trans.

T. Mayer, *Struggling with the Philosopher: A Refutation of Avicenna’s*

*Metaphysics* (London: 2001), 8.6–11.2; 24.3–31.2; and 43.3–46.10 (trans.

23–5, 33–7, and 44–6).

28 E.g., al-Ra¯zı¯, *Sharh. al-isha¯ ra¯ t*, 200.3–204.7.

29 To some extent this dilemma is symptomatic of Avicenna’s ambivalence

over the degree of genuine agency enjoyed by humans during the

act of intellection; on this see now D. Hasse, “Avicenna on Abstraction,”

in Wisnovsky [104], 39–72.

30 See al-Bayd. ¯aw¯ı’s (and following him, al-Is.fah¯an¯ı’s) description of the

position of the “philosophers” (here probably referring to Avicenna) at

*Mat.*

*¯ ali‘ al-anz. ¯ ar: Sharh. t.*

*awa¯ li‘ al-anwa¯ r* 36 (English trans. byCalverley

and Pollock, vol. I, 176–7).

31 E.g., al-Tafta¯za¯nı¯, *Sharh. al-‘aqa¯ ’id al-nasafiyya*, 52.2–60.5 and 69.2–

72.10 (top part of the inside box; English trans. by Elder, 36–40 and

49–53). For a Sh¯ı‘¯ı counterargument, seeH.

aydar A¯ mulı¯ (d. after 1385),

*Ja¯mi‘ al-asra¯ r*, ed. H. Corbin and O. Yahia (Paris: 1969), 139.7–142.11.

32 See Im¯am al-H. aramayn al-Juwayn¯ı (d. 1085), *al-‘Aq¯ıda al-Niz.*

*a¯miyya*,

ed. M. Z. al-Kawthar¯ı (Cairo: 1948), 16.19ff., 14.12ff., and 25.3ff.;

and *Kita¯b al-irsha¯d*, ed. and French trans. J.-D. Luciani (as *El-Irchad*

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*par Imam el-Haramein*) (Paris: 1938), 17.16ff. and 94.3ff.; al-Sanu¯ sı¯

(d. 1490), *al-‘Aqı¯da al-sanu¯ siyya*, in Ibra¯hı¯m al-Ba¯ ju¯ rı¯ (d. 1860),

*H.*

*a¯ shiya ‘ala¯ matn al-Sanu¯ siyya* (Cairo: 1856), 57.8–58.2 (marg.);

Ibr ¯ah¯ım al-Laq¯an¯ı (d. ca. 1631), *Jawhara al-tawh. id* (Cairo: n.d.), 28.1

and 31.1; and al-Fad. a¯ lı¯ (d. 1821), *Kifa¯ya al-‘awa¯mm fı¯ ‘ilm al-kala¯m*,

in Ibr ¯ah¯ım al-B¯aj ¯ ur¯ı, *H.*

*a¯ shiya ‘ala¯ Kifa¯ya al-‘awa¯mm* (Cairo: 1906),

31.1–33.1; 38.2–4 and 44.1 (all top section of page).

33 Ab ¯ u al-Mu‘¯ın al-Nasaf¯ı, *Kit ¯ ab tabs.*

*ira al-adilla*, ed. K. Sal¯ama (Damascus:

1993), 61.1–63.3.

34 ‘Alla¯ma al-H. illı¯, *Kashf al-mura¯d fı¯ sharh. Tajrı¯d al-i‘tiqa¯d* (Beirut:

1979), 305.1–306.12; al-La¯hı¯jı¯, *Shawa¯ riq al-ilha¯m fı¯ sharh. Tajrı¯d alkala*

*¯m* (Is.faha¯n: reprint of lithograph from 1878/1893), 494.13–504.26.

35 Al-T. u¯ sı¯, *Sharh. al-isha¯ ra¯ t*, 194.13–17 (inside box). I argue against

al-T. u¯ sı¯’s interpretation in Wisnovsky [233].

36 For a concise overview, see now Gutas [94]; see also Wisnovsky [261].

Some work on the naturalization of Avicenna’s metaphysics in Sh¯ı‘¯ı

*kala¯m* has been done; see, for example, Schmidtke [259], esp. 180–6,

and Schmidtke [260], esp. 37–114, and nowA. al-Rahim, “The Twelver-

Sh¯ı‘¯ı Reception of Avicenna in the Mongol Period,” in Reisman [103],

219–31. On the Sunn¯ı side, by contrast, little is available apart from van

Ess’ (German) translation of and commentary on the first part of the

Sunn¯ı *mutakallim* al-¯Ij¯ı’s (d. 1355) *Book of Stations*: see J. van Ess, *Die*

*Erkenntnislehre des ‘Ad. udaddı¯n al-I¯cı¯: U¨ bersetzung und Kommentar*

*des 1. Buches seinerMawa¯qif* (Wiesbaden: 1966), and even this concentrates

more on epistemology than metaphysics. But see also Y.Michot,

“L’avicennisation de la sunna, du sab’eisme au leurre de la H.

an¯ıfiyya:

`a propos du *Livre des religions et des sectes*, II d’al-Shahrast¯an¯ı,”

*Bulletin de philosophie m´edi ´evale* 35 (1993), 113–20, and J. Michot,

“La pand’emie avicennienne au VIe/XIIe si `ecle: pr’esentation, editio

princeps et traduction de l’introduction du *Livre de l’advenue du*

*monde* (*Kita¯b h. udu¯ th al-‘a¯ lam*) d’Ibn Ghayla¯n al-Balkhı¯,” *Arabica* 40

(1993), 287–344.

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7 Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı

The writings of al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı (d. 1111) mark a critical stage in the

history of Arabic philosophy. He is noted for his classic, *The*

*Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Taha¯ fut al-fala¯ sifa*), an incisive

critique largely of the metaphysics and psychology of Avicenna

(d. 1037). At the same time, he is also noted for adopting Avicennian

philosophical ideas. This at first sight seems paradoxical, if

not downright inconsistent. In fact, he adopted them after reinterpreting

them in terms of his Ash‘arite occasionalist perspective (to

which we will shortly turn), rendering them consistent with his theology.

This reinterpretation is not without intrinsic philosophical

interest.

Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı was a renowned Islamic lawyer (*faq¯ıh*), speculative

theologian (*mutakallim*), but above all an Islamic mystic (*s.*

*u¯ fı¯*). In

his autobiography, written a few years before his death, he states

that it was the quest after certainty that motivated his intellectual

and spiritual journey and that he finally found this certainty

in direct mystical experience, *dhawq*, a technicalS.

u¯ fı¯ term that literally

means “taste.”1 Although trained in the Ash‘arite school of

speculative theology, *kala¯m*, to which he contributed two works,

he was also critical of this discipline. This has raised the question

of whether his mysticism was at odds with his theology, which

included the reinterpreted, assimilated, Avicennian philosophical

ideas. A close reading – in proper context – of his writings during

the period in which he became a mystic suggests that this is

not really the case. As we hope to indicate, his mysticism and

his theological–philosophical affirmations tend to complement each

other.

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life and career

Born in 1058 in the city of T.

u¯ s or its environs in northeast Persia,

al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı had a traditional Islamic education in*madrasa*s, religious

colleges that focused on the study of religious law. After studying in

T.

u¯ s, then Jurja¯n, hewent (around 1077) toNı¯sha¯pu¯ rwhere he studied

with the renowned Im¯am al-H. aramayn al-Juwayn¯ı, a jurisconsult of

the school of al-Sha¯ fi‘ı¯ (d. 820) and a leading theologian of the *kala¯m*

of al-Ash‘arı¯ (d. 935). It is probable that during his studies inNı¯sha¯pu¯ r

he had some exposure to philosophy: its intensive study came later

when in Baghdad.

Al-Juwayn¯ı died in 1085. Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı seems to have remained in

Nı¯sha¯pu¯ r for some six years. He acquired the reputation of being

a brilliant scholar who contributed works on Sh¯ afi‘¯ı law. In 1091,

the vizier Niz.

¯am al-Mulk appointed him as professor of law in the

Niz.

¯amiyya at Baghdad. This was the most prestigious of a number

of colleges that took their name from their founder, Niz.

¯am al-Mulk,

the vizier of the Seljuk Turkish sultans, for the teaching of Sh¯ afi‘¯ı

law. These sultans wielded real power in Baghdad, but their power

was legitimized by the ‘Abb¯asid caliph. The Seljuk Turks had adopted

Islam in its Sunn¯ı (orthodox) form and were hence in conflict with

the Sh¯ı‘ite F¯at.imid anti-caliphate in Cairo. The Niz.¯amiyya colleges

were intended in part to counteract F¯at.imid religious doctrine. One of

the books al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı wrote when he came to Baghdad, *The Scandal of*

*the Esoterics* (*Fad.*

*¯ a’ih.*

*al-ba¯ tiniyya*), commissioned by the ‘Abba¯ sid

caliph, al-Mustaz.hir (d. 1118), was a theological attack on F¯at.imid

doctrine.

Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı taught at Baghdad from 1091 until 1095. Probably early

during this period, he underwent a period of skepticism. For in his

quest after certainty, as he tells us in his autobiography,2 he could no

longer trust the senses. How could one trust the strongest of these

senses, sight? We look at the shadow and see it static, but later find

out that it has moved and has been moving all the time, gradually,

imperceptibly. Again, we look at the sun and it appears to us to be

the size of a coin, but astronomical proof shows that it is greater than

our earth. This skepticism extended to reason. If the senses cannot

be trusted, can one trust reason? Here again, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı found no

guarantee that the primary principles of reason – the principle of

the excluded middle, for example – can be trusted. For one cannot

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demonstrate their truthwithout circularity,without assuming them.

This skepticism, he tells us, was an illness that afflicted himfor two

months, until God restored to him belief in reason.

The four years of teaching at the Niz.

¯amiyya were also the years

of al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s intensive studies of philosophy and his writing of

a number of works relating to it. Of these, the most important

was his *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. He also wrote *The*

*Aims of the Philosophers* (*Maqa¯ s. id al-fala¯ sifa*), a work of exposition

that closely followed Avicenna’s Persian work, *The Book of Knowledge*

*for [Prince] ‘Ala¯ ‘ı¯ [al-Dawla]* (*Da¯nishna¯ma-yi ‘Ala¯ ’ı¯*). The *Aims*

became known in its Latin translation to the medievalWest, but was

mistakenly thought to be an expression of al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s own philosophy.

In introducing it and at the end of this work, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı states

that he wrote it to explain the Islamic philosophers’ theories as a prelude

to his refuting them in the *Incoherence.* Curiously, however, the

*Incoherence* neither mentions nor alludes to it. It is possible that he

initially wrote it to summarize for himself the philosophical theories

he was studying and that later, when he decided to circulate it,

he added the statements that he wrote it as a prelude to the *Incoherence*.

This, however, is speculation. Another work of this period,

explicitly related to the *Incoherence*, is *The Standard for Knowledge*

(*Mi‘ya¯ r al-‘ilm*). It was expressly written as an appendix to the *Incoherence*.

This is essentially an exposition of Avicenna’s logic, the

most comprehensive of several expositions of this logic he wrote.

To this period also belongs his most important theological work,

*Moderation in Belief* (*al-Iqtisa¯d fı¯ al-i‘tiqa¯d*). It is an Ash‘arite work

which al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı held in high regard. Written after the *Incoherence*,

it is closely related to it. The purpose of the *Incoherence*, as al-

Ghaz¯ al¯ı clearly states, is to refute the philosophers, not to affirmtrue

doctrine.3 The affirmation of doctrine is embodied in the *Moderation*

and in a shorter complementary Ash‘arite work, the *Principles*

*of Belief* (*Qawa¯ ‘id al-‘aqa¯ ‘id*), incorporated in his later voluminous

work, *The Revival of the Sciences of Religion* (*Ih. ya¯ ’ ‘ulu¯m al-dı¯n*),4

written after he left Baghdad to follow theS.

u¯ fı¯ path.

This decision followed a spiritual crisis. As he tells it in his autobiography,

he realized that his motivation in pursuing his career

as teacher and writer was worldly success. It was not an authentic

religious impulse. He also hints at a deeper reason, namely, a

dissatisfaction with the purely doctrinal and rational approaches to

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religion. These bypassed the most essential aspect of the religious

life – the directly experiential, the *dhawq* we referred to earlier. He

had read the works of S.u¯ fı¯s and wanted to follow their practice. This

meant seclusion and devotion unencumbered by worldly concerns.

He decided to leave Baghdad and the prestigious teaching position

he held. To do so without opposition from the authorities, he gave as

his reason his intention to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. After making

appropriate arrangements for the welfare of his family, he traveled to

Syria and secluded himself in the mosque inDamascus. He then went

to Jerusalem and the Dome of the Rock, and also visited Hebron. He

then visited Mecca and Medina.

He spent some eleven years away from teaching as he became

a S.u¯ fı¯. During this period he wrote his magnum opus, the *Ih. ya¯ ’*,

which strove to reconcile traditional Muslim belief withS.

u¯ fism. In

related works, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı tended to interpret what theS.

u¯ fı¯s termed

the “annihilation” (*al-fana¯ ’*) of the self in God as “closeness” (*qurb*)

to the divine attributes, a view more acceptable to traditional Islamic

belief. The *Ih. ya¯ ’* included homilies designed to nurture Islamic piety,

in part to encourage an ascetic way of life as a necessary requirement

for those intent on following theS.

u¯ fı¯ path. In 1106, he resumed his

teaching of Islamic law first at N¯ısh¯ap ¯ ur and then atT.u¯ s, where he

died in 1111. His return to the teaching of law saw the writing of

hismajor work on Islamic law, namely, *The Choice Essentials of the*

*Principles ofReligion* (*al-Mustasf ¯ amin us.*

*u¯ l al-dı¯n*).After thewriting

of the *Ih. ya¯ ’*, al-Ghaza¯ lı¯ wrote a number of important shorter works

which include among others the following: *The Highest Goal in*

*Explaining the Beautiful Names of God* (*al-Maqs.*

*ad al-asna¯ fı¯ asma¯ ’*

*Alla¯h al-h. usna¯* ); *The Decisive Criterion for Distinguishing Belief*

*from Unbelief* (*Faysal al-tafriqa bayn al-Islamwa al-zandaqa*); *The*

*Book of Forty* (*Kita¯b al-arba‘ı¯n*), which sums up some main ideas

of the *Ih. ya¯ ’*; the two mystical works, *The Alchemy of Happiness*

(*Kı¯mı¯a¯ -ye sa‘a¯dat*) in Persian and *The Niche of Lights* (*Mishka¯ t alanwa*

*¯ r*); his autobiography, *The Deliverer from Error* (*al-Munqidh*

*min al-d. ala¯ l*); and his last work, *Restraining the Commonality from*

*the Science of Kala¯m* (*Ilja¯m al-‘awa¯m ‘an ‘ilm al-kala¯m*).

Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s religious thought is multi-faceted and is expressed

in a variety of contexts. One way to approach it is to discuss it first

in terms of the relation of his Ash‘arite theology to philosophy and

then in relation to his mysticism.

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ghaza￣ lı￣ and the ash‘arites

The work in which al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı expresses his Ash‘arite theology in

detail is the *Moderation in Belief.* It is significant that he expressed

his high regard for this work long after he had become aS.

u¯ fı¯, in *The*

*Book of Forty* (written after the *Ih. ya¯ ’*), in which he proclaims that

the *Moderation in Belief* contains the essentials of the science of the

theologians, in effect, the Ash‘arite theologians (*al-mutakallim¯ın*).

He then adds that it goes deeper than the Ash‘arite works of *kala¯m*

in ascertaining the truth and “is closer to knocking at the door of

gnosis” (*abwa¯b al-ma‘rifa*) than the “official discourse” (*al-kala¯m*

*al-rasm¯ı*) encountered in their books.5 It is significant that he did

not regard it as one of the “official” Ash‘arite works and that he held

it to be superior to such works in ascertaining what is true.

The cornerstone of Ash‘arite theology is its doctrine of the divine

attributes. Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı endorses and expands on this doctrine. For

the Ash‘arites, the divine attributes of life, knowledge, will, power,

speech, hearing, and seeing are co-eternal with the divine essence

and intimately related to it, but are not identical with it. They are

attributes “additional” (*za¯ ’ida*) to the divine essence. This point is

quite basic, particularly for understanding al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s rejection and

condemnation of the philosophical doctrine of an eternal world. For

if these attributes are identical with the divine essence, then the

divine act would be an essential act, an act which proceeds as the

necessary consequence of the very essence or nature of God. Now for

Avicenna, with whom al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı is contending, God is the supreme

essential cause for all the existents that successively emanate from

him, the totality of which is the world. According to Avicenna, the

priority of the essential cause to its effect is ontological, not temporal.

The essential cause coexists with its effect. Hence, for Avicenna,

the world as the necessitated effect of the eternal essential cause is

necessarily eternal.

This consequence meant for al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı the negation of the divine

attribute of will. To be sure, for al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, whatever the divine eternal

will chooses and decrees must come about. In this sense the

existence of what it decrees is necessary. It is not, however, necessitated

by the divine essence. Not being identical with the divine

essence, the eternal will does not have to decree the creation of the

world. It does so “freely,” so to speak, by an eternal voluntary act.

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According to al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, by this act it decrees the world’s creation

out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) at a finite moment in time in the past from

the present.

Whatever the divine will decrees comes about through the

attribute of divine power. This brings us to the relation of the divine

attributes of life, knowledge,will, and power to each other. These are

conditionally related. There can be no knowledge without life, no

will without knowledge, and no power without will. Each, that is

life, knowledge, will, and power, is respectively a necessary condition

for the other. This does not, however, mean that they “cause”

each other. They are eternal coexisting uncaused attributes. Moreover,

the eternal will decrees that all created existents and events

follow a uniform course. Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı refers to this uniform course

as *ijra¯ ’ al-‘a¯da*, God’s ordaining things to flow according to a habitual

course. But this habitual course is not in itself necessary. It can

be disrupted without contradiction. The eternal will that decrees

this uniform, habitual course decrees also its disruptions at certain

moments of history. These disruptions are the miracles that God

creates on behalf of his prophets and holy men.

The divine attribute of power is the sole cause of all created things

and events.6 It is also pervasive. By this al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı means that divine

power is one, not divisible into many powers, and is the cause of each

and every created existent and event. Our world consists of bodies,

composed of indivisible atoms and accidents that inhere in them.

The atoms, the accidents, the bodies they compose, and all sequences

of events are the direct creation of this pervasive divine power. The

uniform course of events constitutes an order which includes what

we habitually regard as causes and effects. But while these behave as

though they are real causes and effects, in fact they are not. They are

concomitant events that are not necessarily connected with each

other and are causally connected only with the one cause, divine

power. This brings us to what is meant by saying that this theology

is occasionalist. Events habitually regarded as causes are merely the

occasions for divine, direct, real causal action. They follow an order

that parallels the order (in all its details) of what Avicenna regards

as real causes and effects, so that normally one can draw “demonstrative”

inferences from the chains of occasionalist/habitual causes

and effects.7

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At the heart of Ash‘arite occasionalism is their doctrine of “acquisition”

(*kasb*). Human acts, like all other events, are the direct creation

of divine power. This power creates in us power we experience

as the cause of our deliberate actions. But just as the events we normally

regard as causes and effects are concomitants, created by divine

power, so are those acts we normally believe to be our deliberate

acts. They are acts concomitant with the events we normally regard

as the “effects” of this power. These “effects,” however, are not of

our doing. They are created for us by divine power. In other words,

the power created in us has no causal efficacy. Whatever we believe

to have been “acquired” by our own power is in reality acquired on

our behalf by divine power. Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı insists that the created power

in us exists only with the acquisition the divine power creates for

us. Created power does not temporally precede the human act. It and

the act are created simultaneously. Moreover, divine power cannot

enact the impossible. It cannot enact in us created power without

first creating in us respectively life, knowledge, and will. Each of

these, however, is the direct creation of divine power.

If this then is the case, how can we differentiate our spasmodic

movements from those movements we normally regard as deliberate?

The classic Ash‘arite answer, which al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı endorses, is that

in the case of the spasmodic movement, such a movement is created

without the created power, whereas what is normally regarded as the

deliberate movement is created with it. This is how they differ. We

ourselves experience this difference. This, however, does not resolve

the question of how this theory can account for human moral responsibility,

premised on the doctrine of the freedom of the human will.

Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı is hardly unaware of this problem. But he supports this

theory of acquisition, suggesting that a resolution of its difficulties

is attained when, through mystical vision, its place in the cosmic

scheme of things is understood.

the incoherence

Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s Ash‘arite occasionalist perspective given in the *Moderation*

*in Belief* is reiterated in different contexts in the *Ih. ya¯ ’*, as

we shall point out. This perspective forms the background of the

*Incoherence* and helps us better understand some of its arguments.

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Now it is true that al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı regarded the *Incoherence* as a work

of refutation and did not intend it to be an exposition of Ash‘arite theology.

He thus declares quite plainly that he is not writing the book

from any one specific doctrinal position (*Incoherence*, 7). Moreover,

on two notable occasions he adopts some of the views of his philosopher

opponents to show that even in terms of their own theories, the

literal scriptural assertions they deem impossible are in fact possible.

In this he is quite consistent with his declaration that the primary

intention of the *Incoherence* is to refute, not to build up doctrine.

Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, however, in one of his later works,8 declared the *Incoherence*

as belonging to the genre of *kala¯m* works – this not inconsistently.

For he held the main task of Ash‘arite *kala¯m* to be the

defence of what he conceived to be Islamic Sunn¯ı doctrine. The *Incoherence*

constitutes such a defence, even though it does not set out

to formulate a doctrine (*Incoherence*, 7). At the same time, there

are many assertions and hidden premises in this work that when

extracted convey a specific theological view, namely, the Ash‘arite.

As we will indicate, an Ash‘arite assertion is introduced as part of

al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s method of refuting. Hence when the chief critic of this

work, Averroes, in his *Incoherence of the Incoherence* (*Taha¯ fut altaha*

*¯ fut*) repeatedly refers to al-Ghaza¯ lı¯’s stance in the *Incoherence*

as Ash‘arite, he is to a good extent justified. But before turning to the

Ash‘arite base that underlies much of the arguments of the *Incoherence*,

a brief word about this work is necessary.

In the *Incoherence*, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı singled out for criticism the

philosophies of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and Avicenna. These two, he holds, are the

best exponents of the philosophy of Aristotle. Here, however, we

have to be reminded that while these two were Aristotelians, they

were also Neoplatonists, each constructing an emanative scheme

that has its own peculiarities. Their respective emanative schemes,

though similar, are not identical. Moreover, their theories of the

soul and eschatologies are also not identical. Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s critique

has as its more direct object the philosophy of Avicenna. Nonetheless,

many of these criticisms apply to aspects of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s thought.

In the *Incoherence* al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı sometimes refers specifically to Avicenna,

but in general he simply refers to his opponents as “the

philosophers.”

The *Incoherence* is aimed at refuting those philosophical ideas

deemed by al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı to contravene Islamic religious belief. It thus

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addresses itself to twenty philosophical theories, three of which it

holds to be utterly opposed to Islamic religious belief, those upholding

them to be infidels, to be groupedwith heretical innovations that

some Islamic sect or another had held. The three theories he condemns

as utterly opposed to Islamic teaching are the theory of a preeternal

world, the theory (specifically Avicennian) that God knows

only the universal aspects of terrestrial particulars, and Avicenna’s

doctrine of the immortal, immaterial soul that denies bodily resurrection.

To refute such theories, all that al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı needs to show

is that contrary to the philosophers’ claims, these theories have not

been demonstrated. He certainly endeavors to do this, but he also

argues that some of them are self-contradictory.

causality

The Ash‘arism of the *Incoherence* is best seen in discussions where

the concept of causality is involved. The First Discussion is devoted

to the question of the world’s origin, and consists of a debate of

four philosophical proofs for the world’s pre-eternity. The debate

of the first proof is the longest. The philosophers’ proof, which al-

Ghaz¯ al¯ı regards as their strongest, is premised on the theory of divine

essential causality. According to the philosophers, a world created

in time would mean the delay of the effect of a necessitating cause

(namely God) when there can be no impediment or any other reason

to account for such a delay. After presenting the philosophers’ argument

in its most forceful way, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı begins his refutation by

asking whether the philosophers can demonstrate the impossibility

of the contradictory of its conclusion, namely, the Ash‘arite doctrine

that the world is created at that moment of time which the eternal

divine will has chosen and decreed for its creation (*Incoherence*,

17). He argues that they can do this neither syllogistically nor by an

appeal to what is self-evidently necessary. If the denial of the conclusion

cannot be proven to be untrue, then its premise that the divine

essential cause necessitates its effect remains unproven. At the conclusion

of this multi-faceted debate, he refers to the philosophers’

theory that the cause for the occurrence of temporal events is the

circular movement of the celestial spheres. He denies this, affirming

the Ash‘arite view that all temporal events are “the initial inventions”

of God (*mukhtara‘a li-al-La¯hi ibtida¯ ‘an*; *Incoherence*, 30).

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In the Third Discussion, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı discusses the use of the term

“agent.” Agency belongs only to a living, willing, knowing being.

When the opponent appeals to correct Arabic usage, as, for example,

when it is said that fire kills, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı insists that this is merely

metaphorical usage: fire as such in reality has no action (*Incoherence*,

58–9) – a point repeated in the Seventeenth Discussion.

While the Seventeenth Discussion is devoted to causality, its real

purpose is to show that some of the miracles, reported in the Qur‘ ¯an

and the prophetic traditions but considered by the philosophers as

impossible, are possible.9 Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı begins the discussion with the

Ash‘arite declaration: “the connection between what is habitually

believed to be a cause and what is habitually believed to be the effect

is not necessary for us.” With any two things, he continues, that

are not identical, where neither the affirmation or negation of the

one entails the affirmation or negation of the other, the existence or

nonexistence of the one does not entail the existence or nonexistence

of the other. He then gives as examples, “the quenching of thirst and

drinking, satiety and eating, light and the appearance of the sun,

death and decapitation.” The connection of these and other such

observable things is due to the prior decree of God, who creates them

side by side. The connections between them are not in themselves

necessary and they are hence capable of separation. It is thus within

divine power, for example, to create death without decapitation and

to continue life after decapitation (*Incoherence*, 166).

Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı then takes his well-known example of the contact of

a piece of cotton with fire. What we see is the occurrence of the

burning of cotton at the point of contact with the fire.We do not see

its being burnt by the fire. What we witness are two concomitant

events. He then asserts that the one who enacts the burning by creating

blackness in the cotton, producing separation in its parts, and

rendering it cinder and ashes, is God, either directly or through the

mediation of his angels (*Incoherence*, 167). (We will be turning to

the question of what al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı means by angelic mediation when

discussing aspects of the *Ih. ya¯ ’*.)

As the discussion of causality proceeds, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı puts in the

mouth of his opponents a major objection. From the denial of necessary

causal connection in natural events, they argue, repugnant

impossibilities will ensue. There will be no order in the world.

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All occurrences would be sheer possibilities whose contraries can

equally occur. A man, for example, will be confronted by wild beasts

and raging fires but will not see them because God has not created

sight for him. All kinds of similar absurdities will then follow

(*Incoherence*, 169–70). To this al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı replies that if things

whose existence is possible are such that there cannot be created for

an individual knowledge of their nonexistence, the impossibilities

the opponents mention would follow. These things they mention,

however, he goes on, are mere possibilities that may or may not

occur. God, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı then asserts, creates in us the knowledge that

he did not enact these possibilities. (Implicit in this answer is al-

Ghaza¯ lı¯’s concept of *ijra¯ ’ al-‘a¯da*, God’s ordaining events to proceed

along a uniform, orderly, habitual course.) As such, the philosophers’

objection amounts to nothing more than sheer vilification

(*Incoherence*, 170).

Still, to avoid being subject to such vilification, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı proposes

another causal theory (*Incoherence*, 171–4). He will concede

that when fire touches two similar pieces of cotton it will burn both.

A measure of causal efficacy is thus allowed in things. But it is

allowed only if the divine act remains voluntary, not necessitated

by his essence, and divine power is such that it can intervene in

nature to allow the miracle. Thus, for example, a prophet placed in

a fiery furnace may be miraculously saved, either by God’s changing

the character of the fire or by creating a cause that impedes its action.

Now al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı tells us that both theories, the Ash‘arite, and the

modified philosophical theory that allows a measure of causal efficacy

in natural things, are possible. But in what sense are both possible?

As they are mutually exclusive, one denying causal efficacy in

things, one allowing it, they cannot be compossible. What al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı

probably means is that either theory, independently of the other, is

internally consistent and that each allows the possibility of those

miracles deemed impossible by the philosophers. This parallels his

argument in the Twentieth Discussion where he concedes the possibility

of the human soul’s being immaterial and proceeds to argue

that even if this is granted, bodily resurrection, denied by Avicenna,

is still possible. In the *Moderation in Belief*, where al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı reaffirms

the Ash‘arite doctrine of a material soul, he refers us back to

the *Incoherence*, saying:

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We have treated this problem in detail in the *Incoherence* adopting in refuting

the philosophers’ doctrine the view that affirms the immortality of the

soul – which according to them has no position in space – and that allows

the resumption of its management of the body, regardless of whether or

not such a body is the same as the original human body. This, however,

is a consequence [we made logically incumbent on them to accept] that

does not agree with what we believe. For that book was written for the

purpose of refuting their doctrine, not for the purpose of establishing true

doctrine.10

Turning back to the second causal argument, we find no reaffirmation

of it in the*Moderation in Belief*, nor in the *Ih. ya¯ ’* and subsequent

writings. All the indications are that it was introduced in the *Incoherence*

for the sake of argument, to show that even if one concedes a

measure of causal efficacy in things, one can still accept themiracles

rejected by the philosophers.

The *Moderation in Belief* affirms the Ash‘arite occasionalist position

forcefully and unequivocally. It reaffirms it by a detailed refutation

of the doctrine of generation (*al-tawallud*) espoused by the

Mu‘tazilite school of *kala¯m*, a doctrine al-Ghaza¯ lı¯ in the *Incoherence*

identified with the philosophers’ causal theory (*Incoherence*, 230).

This refutation is concluded with the announcement that “all temporal

things, their substances and accidents, those occurring in the

entities of the animate and the inanimate, come about through the

power of God . . . He alone holds sole prerogative of inventing them.

It is not the case that some creatures come about through others;

rather, all come about through [divine] power” (*Moderation*, 99).

Then in a discussion of the term *ajal*, the predestined term of life

of an individual human, the question arises in the case of decapitation

whether or not it is decapitation that causes death. Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı

answers:

It ought to be said that [the decapitated individual] died by his *ajal*, *ajal*

meaning the time in which God creates in him his death, regardless of

whether this occurs with the cutting of the neck, the occurrence of a lunar

eclipse, or the falling of rain. All these for us are associated things, not generated

acts, except that with some the connection is repeated according to

habit (*bi-al-‘a¯da*) but with some they are not repeated. (*Moderation*, 224–5)

The divine eternal will has so ordained it that (barring a miracle,

also preordained by this will), death always follows decapitation,

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even though the real cause of death is divine power. This is brought

home in al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s endorsement of Avicenna’s Aristotelian

demonstrative logic, where the necessary connection in natural

events in effect is denied, substituting for it the habitual uniform

course, in itself contingent, but which, decreed by the divine will,

is the norm. It is this habitual uniform course that is the ultimate

justification for scientific inference, for scientific knowledge.

In the *Standard for Knowledge*, the logical treatise appended to the

*Incoherence*, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı accepts the Avicennian claim that certain

empirical premises yield certainty. How can this be, he poses as an

objection, “when the theologians have doubted this, maintaining

that it is not decapitation that causes death, nor eating satiation,

nor fire burning, but that it is God who causes burning, death, and

satiation at the occurrence of their concomitant events, not through

them?” In response al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı writes:

The theologian admits the fact of death, but inquires about the manner of

connection between decapitation and death. As for the inquiry of whether

this is a necessary consequence of the thing itself, impossible to change, or

whether this is in accordance with the custom (*sunna*) of God, the exalted,

due to the fulfillment of His will that can undergo neither substitution nor

change, this is an inquiry into the mode of connection, not into the connection

itself.11

Now, Avicenna no less than al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı maintains that observation

by itself shows only concomitance. In addition to the observation of

regularities, he argues, there is “a hidden syllogism,” namely, that

if these past regularities were accidental or coincidental they would

not have continued always or for the most part. From this, Avicenna

draws the conclusion that the regularities derive from the inherent

causal properties of things. Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı accepts the existence of such

“a hidden syllogism” but draws from it the different conclusion,

namely, that this regularity derives from the decree of the eternal

will.12

occasionalism in the ih. y ￣ a’

When we turn to al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s writing after his following the S.

u¯ fı¯

path, particularly his monumental *Ih. ya¯ ’*, we find confirmation of

the Ash‘arite occasionalist perspective. We meet this confirmation

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in different contexts of the *Ih. ya¯ ’*.We find it, as expected, in *The Principles*

*of Belief*, which outlines and defends the Ash‘arite articles of

faith, particularly in its endorsement of the doctrine of *kasb*. Sometimes

we find it unexpectedly in contexts where it appears as though

a comment made in passing. A passage in the *Book of Love* (*Kita¯b*

*al-mah.*

*abba*) from the *Ih. ya¯ ’* is a case in point:

How is it imaginable that the human would love himself and not love his

Lord through whom is his sustenance? It is known that inasmuch as the

one afflicted by the heat of the sun loves the shade, [such a person] would

necessarily love the trees through which the shade subsists. Everything in

existence in relation to the power of God, exalted be He, is like the shade

in relation to the trees and light in relation to the sun. For all [things] are

the effects of His power and the existence of all [things] follows His existence,

just as the existence of light follows [the existence] of the sun and

shade [the existence] of the trees. Indeed, this example is sound relative to

the imaginings of the common people. For they imagine that the light is the

effect of the sun, emanates from it and exists by it.

This, however, is pure error, since it has been revealed to the masters [of

those who know by means] of the heart (*li-arba¯b al-qulu¯ b*) by a revelation

that is clearer than what is observed by sight that the light comes about

“by invention” (*ikhtira¯ ‘n*) from the power of God, exalted be He, when it

happens that the sun and opaque bodies face each other, just as the sun, its

eye, its shape and form occur through the power of God, exalted be He. But

the purpose of examples is to explain, the truth not being sought in them.

(*Ih. ya¯ ’* IV.293, 22–9)

What we have here is the use of the common belief in the efficacy

of natural things – proclaimed a pure error – as an example to

illustrate a point. The sun and the opaque body it faces are not the

real causes. They are merely the habitual or occasional causes. This

point becomes more explicit in al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s discussion of astrology

in the *Ih. ya¯ ’*. The discussion first occurs in *The Book of Knowledge*.

Astrology, according to al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, is inferring (and predicting)

temporal events from astral causes, this, in principle, being similar

to the physician’s inferring from the pulse what malady will

take place. This, he affirms, “is knowledge of the currents [of events

according] to the custom (*sunna*) and habit (*‘a¯da*) of God, exalted be

he, in his creation” (*Ih. ya¯ ’* I.30). Some prophets in the past have been

endowed with this astral predictive ability. The religious law, however,

blames the practice of astrology, because it is harmful to most

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people. The main source of this harm is that when told that “these

effects occur subsequent to the movement of the stars, they come to

believe that the stars are the things that are efficacious” (*Ih. ya¯ ’* I.31).

For the perception of the weak, as distinct from those well grounded

in knowledge, is confined to the intermediaries, not realizing that

the celestial orbs are compelled entities behaving in subjection to

divine command.

This is complemented by a discussion of astrology in *The Book*

*of Patience and Gratitude* (*Kit ¯ ab al-s.*

*abr wa al-shukr*). Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı

writes:

You must not think that belief in the stars, the sun, and moon [as being]

compelled by the command of God, praised be He, in matters for which [the

former] are rendered causes in accordance with [divine] wisdom is contrary

to the religious law – [this] by reason of what has come down in it by way

of prohibiting belief in the astrologers and astrology. Rather, prohibition

concerning the stars consists of two things.

One of them is that [these heavenly bodies] enact their effects, independently,

and that they are not compelled under the management of a Manager

that created and subdued them. This would be infidelity (*kufr*).

The second is to believe the astrologers in the detail of what they inform

about the effects, the rest of creation not sharing in the apprehension [of

such effects]. This is because [the astrologers] state [things] out of ignorance.

For the knowledge of the stars’ determination [of events] was a miracle to

some prophets, peace be on them, but this science became obliterated. What

remains is a mixture where truth and error are not distinguished. For the

belief that the stars are causes (*asba¯b*) for effects (*a¯ tha¯ r*) that come about

by the creation of God, exalted be He (*bi-khalq al-La¯hi ta‘a¯ la¯* ), in the earth,

plants, and animals, does not belittle religion. (*Ih. ya¯ ’* IV.114, 20–8)

The key expression in this last paragraph is “by the creation of God.”

The *asba¯b*, “causes,” are not the things that bring about those effects

in the earth, plants, and animals. The effects come about by God’s

creation. But then, what does al-Ghaza¯ lı¯ mean by “causes” (*asba¯b*),

“intermediaries” (*was ¯ a’it.*

), and things acting through God’s “compulsion”

(*taskh¯ır*)? One has to look carefully at the context and

extract his meaning from it. Read in proper context, when al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı

speaks of “causes” other than God, what he is referring to are the

habitual causes. Some of these (but not all) constitute conditions for

the creation of the habitual effects – the creation of will, knowledge,

and life in humans are conditions preceding the creating of human

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power, for example. And when he speaks of intermediaries, “compelled

to act,” particularly angelic intermediaries, at first sight he

seems to be endowing these with causal efficacy. But some of his

statements indicate the opposite of this.

In the chapter on divine unity, the *Basis of Trust* (*Ih. ya¯ ’* IV.240ff.),

al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı tells us that it is revealed to the gnostic that “there is no

agent except God . . . and that he has no partner sharing his act.”

The same act, however, is sometimes attributable to the servant in

the sense that he is the locus of divine action, but to God in terms

of causal efficacy, that is, in terms of “the connection of the effect

to the cause and the created thing to his creator” (*Ih. ya¯ ’* III.123). It is

in terms of this that in the Qur’ ¯an the act is sometimes attributed to

God, sometimes to the servant, sometimes to angels. But if God is

the only true agent, “no partner sharing his act,” one must conclude

that the angel, like the human servant, is the locus of divine action

and is an intermediary only in this sense.

Al-Ghaza¯ lı¯’s occasionalism pervades the *Ih. ya¯ ’*. How then does

this tally with al-Ghaza¯ lı¯’s criticisms of Ash‘arite *kala¯m*, in the

*Ih. ya¯ ’* and elsewhere?13 The main reason that underlies his many

criticisms is epistemological. Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı holds that the main function

of Ash‘arite *kala¯m* is the defence of traditional Islamic belief

against “heretical innovations.” This function is not unimportant.

For a firm hold of this traditional belief which entails utter devotion

to the one God and the piety that attends it is the basis for

salvation in the hereafter for all Muslims; and for those pursuing

the mystical path, the necessary foundation for their ascent towards

gnosis. But the act of defending traditional belief is only a means to

an end. When *kala¯m* is taken as an end in itself it leads to the error

that it constitutes what is experientially religious. Moreover, even

the most sincere and religiously motivated theologians who direct

their thought to attaining “one of the realities,” can be veiled by

beliefs “that solidify in their souls, and become fixed in their hearts,

becoming a veil between them and the apprehension of realities”

(*Ih. ya¯ ’* III.13, 19–20).

This brings us to the main concern of al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı in his mystical

writings, namely “the apprehension of realities.” These realities

belong to the divine world of the unseen (*‘a¯ lam al-malaku¯ t*). Direct

experience of them involves mystical vision. It is this mystical vision

that yields certainty.Now, for al-Ghaza¯ lı¯, while Ash‘arite *kala¯m*can

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be a veil preventive of this mystical vision, it can also constitute a

move toward it. This brings us back to his statement about hismajor

Ash‘arite work, the *Moderation in Belief*. He states that this work

not only supersedes the official Ash‘arite *kala¯m* works in ascertaining

what is true, but is “closer to knocking at the doors of gnosis.”

In what way, then, can Ash‘arism be close to knocking at the doors

of gnosis?

There is one Ash‘arite doctrine in particular which al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı

relates to the mystic vision. This is the doctrine of acquisition, *kasb*,

which is at the heart of the causal question. The basic premise of this

doctrine – repeatedly and unequivocally affirmed in the *Ih. ya¯ ’* – is that

each and every human act is the direct creation of divine power. To

formulate intellectually the doctrine of *kasb* is one thing. To understand

what it means in the cosmic scheme of things is another. Al-

Ghaz¯ al¯ı tells us quite plainly that this understanding is attainable

only through mystical vision. What we have here are in effect two

different, but complementary, levels of knowing.

To return to more mundane matters, it is al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s discussions of

causality that are of special significance for the history of Arabic philosophy.

Although theologically motivated, his argument that necessary

causal connections in nature are provable neither logically

nor empirically remains philosophical. In his adoption of Avicennian

demonstrative logic (by reinterpreting causal sequences on occasionalist

lines), al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı brings home the point that science rests on the

belief in nature’s uniformity. This belief he shares with Avicenna.

What he does not share with him, as already indicated, is the justification

of this belief.

notes

1 Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı [110], 101–2.

2 Ibid., 65–8.

3 Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı [111], 7, 46; hereafter *Incoherence*.

4 Al-Ghaza¯ lı¯, *Ih. ya¯ ’ ‘ulu¯m al-dı¯n*, 4 vols. (Cairo: 1377 A.H./1957 C.E.),

hereafter *Ih. ya¯ ’*.

5 Al-Ghaz¯al¯ı, *Kit ¯ ab al-arba‘¯ın f¯ı us.*

*u¯ l al-dı¯n* (*The Book of Forty on the*

*Principles of Religion*), ed.M.M. Abu¯ al-A‘la¯ (Cairo: 1964), 22 (hereafter

*Arba‘¯ın*).

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6 See the author’s “Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s Chapter on Divine Power in the

*Iqtis.a¯d*,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 4 (1994), 279–315. For a rival

interpretation of Ghaz¯ al¯ı on this point, see Frank [108] and Frank [109];

my response to Frank’s interpretation is presented in Marmura [118].

See also the review of Frank [109] in A. Dallal, “Ghazali and the Perils

of Interpretation,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122

(2002), 773–87.

7 For a discussion of al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s reinterpreation and adoption of

Avicenna’s demonstrative logic, see Marmura [116].

8 Al-Ghaza¯ lı¯, *Jawa¯hir al-Qur’a¯n* (*Jewels of the Qur’a¯n*), ed. M. R. R.

al-Qabbani (Beirut: 1986), 39.

9 The literature on the discussion of causality in this chapter

is extensive. See, for example, in chronological order, Fakhry

[107]; H. A. Wolfson, “Nicolas of Autrecourt and Ghazali’s Argument

against Causality,” *Speculum* 44 (1969), 234–8; B. Kogan,

“The Philosophers al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı and Averroes on Necessary Connection

and the Problem of the Miraculous,” in Morewedge

[32], 113–32; L. E. Goodman, “Did al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı Deny Causality?”

*Studia Islamica* 47 (1978), 83–120; I. Alon, “Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı on

Causality,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 100 (1980),

397–405; B. Abrahamov, “Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s Theory of Causality,” *Studia*

*Islamica* 67 (1988), 75–98; S. Riker, “Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı on Necessary Causality,”

*The Monist* 79 (1996), 315–24; B. Dutton, “Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı on Possibility

and the Critique of Causality,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*

10 (2001), 23–46. See also my own studies of the question in Marmura

[116], [117], [118], and [119].

10 Al-Ghaza¯ lı¯, *al-Iqtis.a¯d fı¯ al-i‘tiqa¯d* (*Moderation in Belief*), ed. I. S.

C﹐ ubukc﹐u and H. Atay (Ankara: 1962), 215 (hereafter *Moderation*). It

is not clear whether in the *Ih. ya¯ ’* Ghaza¯ lı¯ continues to adhere to this

doctrine of the soul; there are suggestions of a shift from this doctrine

toward an immaterial one. But this is not definite; see Gianotti [112].

11 Al-Ghaza¯ lı¯,*Mi‘ya¯ r al-‘ilm*(*The Standard for Knowledge*), ed. S. Dunya

(Cairo: 1961), 190–1. See also above, n. 6.

12 Ibid., 188–9, 191.

13 For a detailed discussion of this question, see Marmura [119].

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8 Philosophy in Andalusia:

Ibn B¯ajja and IbnT.

ufayl

From the first incursion of Islam into Spain in 710 until the eventual

success of the Christian reconquest in 1492, the Iberian peninsula

was partially or wholly under Muslimrule, the westernmost outpost

of a sprawling Muslimempire. For many decades the intellectual and

cultural climate of “al-Andalus” was thus subsidiary to that of the

East. Philosophy was no exception: it came first from the East, but

in time acquired an autonomous life. This is reflected in the history

of Andalusian philosophy, which at first followed in the footsteps of

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and Avicenna, but soon developed along two very different

paths. On the one hand, the Andalusians took up al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s project

of reconstructing and further developing the thought of Aristotle, a

process that would culminate in the commentaries of Averroes. On

the other hand, Andalusian philosophers were attracted by S.

u¯ fism.

Most prominently, the mystic Ibn ‘Arab¯ı hailed from al-Andalus.

But as will be indicated below, even authors who worked within

the *falsafa* tradition were not immune to the appeal of the S.

u¯ fı¯s.

This chapterwill illustrate these competing traditions in the thought

and writings of the two most significant Muslim philosophers of

al-Andalus prior to Averroes: Ibn B¯ajja (known as Avempace to the

Latins) and IbnT.

ufayl.

ibn ba￣ jja (avempace)

In his account of the study of the sciences in al-Andalus, Abu¯ al-

Q¯asimS. ¯a‘id ibnS.

¯a‘id (d. 1070) mentioned those who were interested

in philosophy in the broad sense up to his time.1 Most were physicians,

while others were devoted to the natural sciences and logic.

Those who cultivated natural philosophy and metaphysics were few

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and their writings have not reached us, except those of Sulaym¯an Ibn

Jabirw¯ al, known also as Ibn Gabirol or Avicebron (1021–58),2 whom

he records among the Jewish scholars.

Abu¯ Bakr ibn al-S. a¯ ’igh, Ibn Ba¯ jja, could not be mentioned by Ibn

S.

¯a‘id since he was born in Saragossa in a year between 1085 and

1090. At the time, Saragossa was the capital of the kingdom of the

Banu¯ Hu¯ d and the petty king ‘Ima¯d al-Dawla might have protected

Ibn B¯ajja, but he stayed in power only until 1110. He was then overthrown

by ‘Alı¯ ibn Yu¯ suf ibn Ta¯ shufı¯n (1107–43), the ruler of the

North African dynasty of the Almoravids, who replaced him with

his brother-in-law, Abu¯ Bakr ibn Ibra¯hı¯m al-S. ahrawı¯, better known

as Ibn T¯ıfilw¯ıt, as governor of the province.3

Ibn B¯ajja had poetical talent and mastered the *muwashshaha*

genre.4 His panegyrics were rewarded with the generosity of his

patron and his intelligence earned him an appointment as a vizier,

but Ibn T¯ıfilw¯ıt died soon, in 1116, fighting against the Christians;

Ibn B¯ajja composed elegies in his memory. Eventually, the Christian

king Alfons I of Aragon conquered Saragossa on December 18, 1118,

and Ibn B¯ajja had to flee. He first found shelter in X`atiba at the court

of the emir Abu¯ Ish. a¯q Ibrahı¯m ibn Yu¯ suf ibn Ta¯ shufı¯n, brother of

the caliph and governor of the Eastern part of al-Andalus. Ibn B¯ajja

remained for the rest of his life within the Almoravid circle and

served for about twenty years in Granada as vizier of the governor

Yah. ya¯ ibn Yu¯ suf ibn Ta¯ shufı¯n. We know that in 1136 he was

in Seville and that his disciple, Abu¯ al-H. asan ibn al-Ima¯m, also a

vizier, accompanied him. Ibn B¯ajja wanted to go to Oran but he died

in Fez in May 1139 (Ramadan 533 A.H.). Ibn Ma‘yu¯ b, a servant of

his enemy the physician Abu¯ al-‘Ala¯ ’ ibn Zuhr, was suspected of

poisoning him with an eggplant. Ibn Zuhr was not his only foe; the

personal enmity of Ibn Kh¯aq¯an against himis well known to us since

he attacked Ibn B¯ajja in the entry he devoted to him in his collection

of poetry, accusing himeven of depriving God of his attributes (*ta‘t.*

*¯ıl*).

The Almoravids bestowed favor on Ibn B¯ajja and other non-religious

scholars, among themM¯ alik ibnWuhaib, who was hismain teacher.

The positive environment for study created during the time of the

petty kingdoms, as described by Ibn S.

¯a‘id, lasted during that of the

Almoravids in spite of the opposition of the preeminent scholars of

religious law (*fiqh*).

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Information about Ibn B¯ajja’s philosophical background is found

in an elaborate study of Ibn B¯ajja’s writings by the late Jam¯ al ad-

D¯ın al-‘Alaw¯ı,5 who tries to establish their chronology and, on this

basis, a developmental account of his thought. Al-‘Alaw¯ı takes into

consideration a letter Ibn Ba¯ jja sent to his friend Abu¯ Ja‘far Yu¯ suf ibn

H.

asday inwhich he explained that he first learned the mathematical

sciences, music, and astronomy. He went on to the study of logic

using the books of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and finally devoted himself to physics,

the philosophy of nature. On the basis of his order of learning, al-

‘Alaw¯ı divides Ibn B¯ajja’s writings into three stages. His writings

on music, astronomy, and logic belong to the first stage; those on

natural philosophy to the second; and those most representative of

his thinking – the *Rule of the Solitary*,6 the *Epistle of Conjunction*,7

and the *Farewell Message*8 – to the third and last stage.

*Philosophy and the classification of sciences*

We may accept al-‘Alaw¯ı’s thesis for the purpose of analyzing Ibn

B¯ajja’s thought. Ibn B¯ajja followed other Andalusians in turning to

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı for logic, writing commentaries on his works without pretending

to be an independent logician. There are extant annotations

on the *Categories*, *De Interpretatione*, and both *Analytics*, and also

on the *Introduction* (a summary of Porphyry’s *Isagoge*) and the *Five*

*Sections*, two short texts of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı.9

Porphyry’s *Isagoge* was translated into Arabic by Abu¯ ‘Uthma¯n

Ya‘qu¯ b al-Dimashqı¯ and his translation was used by al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯

in his *Kit ¯ ab ¯Isa¯ ghu¯ jı¯*, which he also calls *Kita¯b al-madkhal*

(*Introduction*).10 Ibn B¯ajja links the book to another by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı,

his *Classification of the Sciences*.11 In his *Isagoge*, Porphyry had

established five universal “meanings” or “sounds” – genus, species,

differentia, property, and accident – as the foundations of logic, the

highest development of which is the syllogism. Ibn B¯ajja goes in

another direction. He is more concerned with the arts that employ

syllogisms, and places his own classification of the sciences before

the exposition of the five universals: “it is in the nature of the syllogistic

arts to employ the syllogism once they are assembled and

completed, and not to have an action as their end.”12 The syllogistic

sciences are five, the first and most important ofwhich is philosophy,

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since it embraces all beings “insofar as it knows them with *certain*

science.” Thus two requirements are to be followed: certainty of

knowledge and universality of scope, and these requirements hold

for the five divisions of philosophy: metaphysics, physics, practical

philosophy, mathematics, and logic.

Metaphysics aims at those beings that are the ultimate causes;

they are neither a body nor in a body. Physics or natural science

aims at the natural bodies, the existence of which does not depend

on human will at all. Practical philosophy – which Ibn B¯ajja calls

“voluntary science” – aims at beings produced by the humanwill and

choice. Mathematics deals with beings abstract from their matters

and is divided into arithmetic, geometry, optics, astronomy, music,

the science of weights, and engineering, the “science of devices,”

which studies:

how to bring into existence many of the things proved theoretically in

mathematics, where the worth of the device consists in removing the hindrances

that perhaps hindered their existence. There are numerical devices

(like algebra), geometrical ones (like those for measuring the surface of bodies

impossible to access), astronomical devices, optical devices (like the art

of mirrors), musical and mechanical devices.13

Logic is the fifth and last division of philosophy and focuses on the

properties that beings acquire in the human mind; “because of such

properties and their knowledge [logic] becomes an instrument for

apprehending the right and the truth in beings.”14 Ibn B¯ajja remarks

that for this reason some people consider logic to be only an instrument

and not a part of philosophy, but insofar as these properties

have real existence, logic can be integrated into philosophy. He concludes

that logic is both part and instrument of philosophy.

Since a distinguishing feature of philosophy is the use of the apodictic

syllogism (*burha¯n*), the only one that yields certain knowledge,

not all syllogistic sciences can be considered parts of philosophy. Ibn

B¯ajja enumerates four such non-philosophical arts. Dialectic relies

only on opinion, and negates or asserts something through methods

of general acceptance. Sophistry aims at beings insofar as itmisrepresents

them and deceives us: itmakes the false look true, and the true,

false. And following the tradition initiated by the Greek commentators

on Aristotle, Ibn B¯ajja includes the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* in

the logic.15

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Nevertheless the classification of the sciences is not complete

because the aforementioned arts are all theoretical and arts like

medicine or agriculture were not considered. Ibn B¯ajja does not

admit these practical arts as syllogistic sciences: although they

make use of syllogisms, they employ them only “for the purpose

of certain activities [or tasks]” and neither medicine nor agriculture,

in their final shape, can be built on syllogisms. By contrast,

Ibn B¯ajja insists, the rules of optics or mechanics can be organized

by means of syllogisms. To sum up, according to Ibn B¯ajja, sciences

are first divided into those built on syllogisms and those

organized without syllogisms. Syllogistic sciences divide into philosophy,

dialectic, sophistic, rhetoric, and poetics. Philosophy subdivides

into demonstrative logic (the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*),

mathematics, natural philosophy, metaphysics, and practical

philosophy.

For Ibn B¯ajja the main purpose of the *Isagoge* is to explain the

concepts that underlie the ten Aristotelian categories, so that the

essence of the *Kita¯b al-madkhal* must be a theory of the individual

and the universal, which develops into an analysis of simple

and composite universal meanings, or intelligibles. Ibn B¯ajja shows

that the five predicables are not primitive concepts, but constitute

correlations between two universals falling within the rules of individuals

and classes. He says: “Genus, species, property, and accident

are correlates (*ida¯ fa*) which are inherent to the intelligibles regarding

the quantity of their subjects.”16 Genus, species, and property

are essences (*ma¯hiyya¯ t*) inhering in a shared subject; by contrast, the

accident is not an essence and exists outside the subject. The specific

difference is related only to the individual and may be grasped

without reference to the universal.

Ibn Ba¯ jja’s annotations to al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯’s *Kita¯b al-madkhal* are more

innovative than they might seem at first. He is concerned to point

out that the *Isagoge* should not be limited to the exposition of the five

“sounds” – maybe six, if the individual is added17 – and that a science

is needed to lay the foundations for the *Organon*. He conceives this

science as a formal theory of individuals and classes, integrated into

the Porphyrian division and the principles of definition and description,

and thinks that this science should establish the ten categories.

Unfortunately he did not carry out his ideas and his words are only

a sketch of the theory.

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*Philosophy of nature*

Among Ibn B¯ajja’s contributions to the philosophy of nature, those

concerning movement are of great import; they are found mainly in

his *Commentary on the Physics*. Shlomo Pines introduced the term

“dynamics”18 to define his views, which no doubt were influenced

by the tradition linked to John Philoponus (d. ca. 566).19 Commenting

on Aristotle’s *Physics*, book VII, Ibn B¯ajja considers the claim that

everything is moved by something else, and says:

It is evident that the rest of the whole because of the rest of one of its parts,

takes place insofar as the movable is other than the mover, and when the

influence of the latter ends, it comes to rest. Its influence ends because the

mover ceases to act either on its own or because something else exerts resistance

on it. Whenever the mover ceases to act on its own, this happens due

either to its destruction, or to exhaustion (*kala¯ l*) of the power of the mover,

or because the cause disappears, or because the movement is complete, since

the movable has reached the end toward which it was moving.

The movements involved here are so-called “violent” movements,

as opposed to “natural” ones, discussed below. Ibn B¯ajja sketches a

theory of dynamics based on a notion of “power” different from the

Aristotelian notion of *dunamis*: they are mechanical forces which

can join another force or counteract it by offering resistance. There

is a minimum amount of moving power for each movable.20 For

instance, to move a boat a minimum of power is needed, otherwise

“one grain of sand could move the boat.” When two opposing

powers are equal, there is no movement, but when one power

“overcomes” the other, the body moves until it suffers “exhaustion”

(*kala¯ l*), because any bodymoved “violently” creates a contrary power

stronger than the one imposed by the mover, and also because the

imposed force becomes “exhausted.” The moving power is also subject

to time and distance factors and the mobile can offer almost no

resistance, so that absolute terms of proportionality do not apply.

Ibn B¯ajja analyzes “natural” movements too, such as a stone’s

falling through air and water. These movables need a moving power

capable not only of moving them but also of displacing the medium

they pass through. Dust particles stay suspended in the air because,

although they possess enough power to go down, the power is insufficient

to displace the air. Ibn B¯ajja differs here from Aristotle, who

thought the medium to be necessary for any natural movement, and

expresses the view that the medium is not a necessary condition,

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but only provides resistance. The different velocity with which the

stone passes through the air or the water is only caused by the different

density of the medium, it is not connatural to the medium. As a

proof that movement without any medium, namely, through a void,

is possible, Ibn B¯ajja adduces the movement of the spheres:

There [in the heavens] there are no elements of violent movement,

because nothing bends their movement, the place of the sphere remains the

same and no new place is taken by it. Therefore circular movement should

be instantaneous [if it were determined by the medium through which it

moved]. But we observe that some spheres move slowly – such as the sphere

of fixed stars – and others fast – the daily movement – and that there isneither

violence nor resistance among them. The cause for the different velocities

is the difference in nobility (*sharf*) between mover and movable.21

The role of the medium is not essential, but is only a kind of resistance,

and thus movement in the void is both theoretically possible

and confirmed by the observation of the spheres. Ibn B¯ajja contradicts

Aristotle and advances a doctrine that Galileo will prove to be

right.22 Once again he gives us only an outline, without undertaking

a deeper inquiry.

His theory of movement is the backbone of his philosophy of

nature, and has a further projection into metaphysics. In his epistle

*On the Mobile*,23 Ibn B¯ajja refers to his commentary on Aristotle’s

*Physics* where it has been proved that there is a First Mover causing

the eternal movement as well as numerous intermediate movers.

The souls of living beings count among those movers. But man’s soul

is characterized by the “deliberative movement” which is possible

because he is rational, and thus deliberates in order to achieve an

end. For the righteous soul this end is “absolute goodness” (*al-khayr*

*‘al ¯ a al-it.*

*la¯q*), andman is able to know the good abstract frommatter,

not only the good embedded in matter. While the soul is in a body,

the body is the instrument in which he moves toward this end, but

movement ceases once the soul has left the body and has become

identical with the pure forms: a process that we will examine in the

next section.

*The metaphysics of forms*

Ibn B¯ajja wrote several independent treatises on metaphysics, but

no commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* is extant, a fact already

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noted by his disciple ‘Al¯ı ibn al-Im¯am. Ibn B¯ajja’s treatise on the

*Union of the Intellect withMan* begins with an annotation on *Metaphysics*,

V.6, on the meaning of “one” or unity,24 but nothing else,

and we may raise the question why he did not write a full commentary

on the *Metaphysics*, given its importance. One reason could be

that the Aristotelian work does not fit well into the Neoplatonic

conception of philosophy, and of metaphysics as a means of ascent

to the highest principle and human happiness. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı had taught

that there is a descending procession from the One, and a corresponding

ascent available to the philosopher, while Avicenna linked

philosophy to the transcendent when he asserted that philosophy

has to achieve direct intellectual vision of the Necessary Being and

the forms that emanate from him.

Ibn B¯ajja takes up Aristotle’s theory of form but gives it a new

meaning, which is central to his system. Like his predecessors al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı and Avicenna, he believes in an emanationist system inwhich

there is a First Being from whom the heavenly intelligences emanate

as far as the last one, the Active Intellect, which endows material

bodies with their forms. The most simple bodies are the four elements:

fire, air, water, and earth. Their forms are only pairs of the

opposite qualities hot–cold, moist–dry: for instance, water is cold

and moist. For Ibn B¯ajja these qualities are essentially powers, powers

that can cause motion.25 From these simple elements all natural

beings are generated and they receive more and more elaborate forms,

the most complex being souls. The simplest of souls is the nutritive

soul, the perfection of the body of a plant; it is followed by the sensitive

soul, belonging to animals, by the imaginative soul, which is

a perfection of men and animals that can make images out of earlier

sensations,26 and finally, by the rational soul. All are active forms,

i.e., powers and faculties, but only the rational soul goes beyond the

limits of the corporeal.

In his *Treatise on the Spiritual Souls*,27 which is the final section

of his book *Rule of the Solitary*, Ibn B¯ajja enumerates those forms

that are free of matter, in descending order:

The spiritual forms are of various kinds: the first kind are the forms of

the circular [i.e., heavenly] bodies, the second are the active intellect and

the acquired intellect, the third are the material intelligibles (*ma‘qu¯ la¯ t*), the

fourth are the intentions (*ma‘a¯nı¯*) existent in the faculties of the soul, i.e.,

existent in common sense, in the imaginative faculty, and in the memory.28

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“Spiritual” therefore applies broadly to every form that is not joined

to matter and is not separable from individual substance; the terminology

and doctrine echo those of Alexander of Aphrodisias. Spiritual

forms divide into universal and particular forms: particular forms

are found in the common sense, and are thus in a sense corporeal,

whereas universal forms are found only in the Active Intellect. Particular

spiritual forms may be true or false instantiations; they are

true only if their predicates exist in corporeal forms of individuals.

Forms thus have three degrees of existence: universal spiritual, particular

spiritual, and particular embodied forms.

Spiritual forms may produce a “state” (*h.*

*a¯ l*) in the soul, either a

state of perfection, as is produced by beauty, the fine arts, or noble

ascent, or of imperfection, produced by the opposite vices. Spiritual

forms, therefore, play a role in every aspect of human activity. Even

the inspiration received by the prophets belongs to the category of

particular spiritual forms, which do not pass through the common

sense, but are received directly from the Active Intellect. As for the

S.

u¯ fı¯s, their experiences belong to the level of the particular spiritual

forms, where common sense, imagination and memory are active.

But they mistake them for universal spiritual forms, and wrongly

believe that the coincidence of the three faculties is the source of

supreme happiness.29

Man has to organize his various faculties – from the rational down

to the nutritive – and there are categories of men according to the

prevalence of each of the three faculties. In some of them, corporeality

prevails, in a select few, spirituality does – Ibn B¯ajja counts

some ascetics and S.

u¯ fı¯s among the latter – but for most the situation

is mixed. Man is moved by spiritual forms that may be as basic

as clothing, housing, or food, but clothing, for instance, acts on two

levels, the protective and the ornamental. Virtues are attached to the

spiritual forms found in the imaginative faculty, because the purpose

of virtuous actions is generating positive feelings and admiration in

the souls of those who see them. The spirituality of most men is,

however, limited to particular forms, and only philosophers attain

the highest degree of spirituality, the immaterial and universal intelligibles

(*akhlas. al-ru¯ h. a¯niyya¯ t*). Although philosophers have to take

due care of the corporeal and particular spiritual forms, in order to

live, and live honorably, their main concern is the universal separated

forms:

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Spiritual acts render him more noble, and the intellectual acts render him

divine and virtuous. The man of wisdom is therefore necessarily a man who

is divine and virtuous. Of every kind of activity, he takes up the best only . . .

when he achieves the highest end – that is, when he apprehends the simple

substantial intelligences (*‘uqu¯ l*) that are mentioned in the *Metaphysics*, *On*

*the Soul*, and *On Sense and the Sensible* – he then becomes one of these

intelligences. It would be right to call him simply divine, and he will be

free from the mortal sensible qualities, as well from the [particular] spiritual

qualities.30

“Divine” here does not mean identicalwith God, but having Godlike

qualities, although his enemies could interpret such words as being

heretical. The philosopher has reached the highest point of human

wisdom, where it continues into the divine world.

*Political philosophy*

If we now contrast Ibn B¯ajjawith his master al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, we realize that

the philosopher has attained this degree of perfection while *solitary*,

without living in the virtuous city. At the beginning of *The Rule of*

*the Solitary*, Ibn B¯ajja explains the meaning of “rule” (*tadb¯ır*) as the

organization of actions toward an end; the proper “rule” is political,

an organization of the lives of the citizens in order to help them

to their perfection. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı, following Plato, had distinguished

four kinds of defective or sick cities or societies: the ignorant, the

wicked, the weakened, and the miscarried, as opposed to the perfect

city, whose success requires philosophers.31 Following him, Ibn B¯ajja

defines the virtuous city as one where its inhabitants do not need

physicians and judges: “love being the strongest bond between them,

there is no contention at all.”32 In the virtuous city all actions are

right: people avoid harmful foods and excessive drink, take physical

exercise, and always act honestly. The imperfect cities, however, do

need doctors, judges, and also “weeds” (*nawa¯bit*). “Weeds” are men

whose views are not the views of the majority; their idiosyncratic

opinions may be true or false, and those whose opinions are correct

are the cause for the coming-to-be of the perfect city in which there

is no disagreement. The solitary “weed” is the agent whose “rule” is

discussed by Ibn B¯ajja, who realized that the cities or societies of his

time belonged to the corrupted types and could not be rehabilitated.

He abandoned al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı at this point and, as Steven Harvey puts it,

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was convinced that intellectual happiness is possible but political

happiness is not.33

The political philosophy of Ibn B¯ajja has attracted much interest

in recent times.34 Nevertheless it is not as essential to his thought

as the doctrine of forms. Ibn B¯ajja was a disciple of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı but

was also a careful reader of the available Aristotelian corpus; we

might say that Aristotelianism entered al-Andalus through him. His

doctrine of spiritual forms seeks to harmonize emanationism with a

hylomorphicvision of nature. The Aristotelian formsbecome powers

moving bodies, *intentiones* moving men, essential constituents of

mankind, and separated substances. Insofar as man is spiritual form,

he can know the intelligibles, although he needs the assistance of

the active intellect. Only the active intellect can be apprehended

without an accompanying spiritual form:

The intellect that itself is its own intelligible has no spiritual form that

is its subject; the intelligible that this intellect apprehends is the intellect

that is one and not multiple, because it has been liberated from the relation

that links form to matter. This sort of vision is the afterlife, and is unified,

ultimate human happiness.35

Ibn B¯ajja’s philosophy does not seek to interpret or to transform the

universe but to make man truly happy. Happiness can in part be

achieved by means of a “noble” life away from corporeal forms,

like that lived by the ascetics and the S.

u¯ fı¯s. But this is not enough:

the true way leads through the perfection of the rational faculty and

the acquisition of philosophical knowledge.

ibn t.

ufayl

In his prologue to the *Story ofH.*

*ayy ibn Yaqz. a¯n*, Abu¯ Bakr Muh. ammad

ibnT.

ufayl al-Qays¯ı (d. 1185) draws a different picture of the state

of philosophy in Andalusia from that given by IbnS.

¯a‘id. IbnT.

ufayl

belongs to the generation that follows Ibn B¯ajja and mentions him

with great admiration, but complains that “most of his extant books

are incomplete and their final sections are missing.”36 Ibn T.

ufayl

names no one of his own generation, since according to him, they

have not reached the level of perfection, or he has not yet appreciated

their true value. Given that two such great thinkers as Ibn

Maimu¯ n or Maimonides (1125–1204) and Averroes (1126–98) belong

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to Ibn T.

ufayl’s generation, he must have written these lines before

1159, when Averroes finished the summaries of Aristotle’s natural

philosophy that first gave him renown. That he would know about

Maimonides is not likely, because of the persecution and eventual

emigration to Egypt of Maimonides and his family.

One century after IbnS.

¯a‘id, IbnT.

ufayl informs us also about the

available books and prevailing trends of philosophy in al-Andalus.

Besides Ibn B¯ajja three authors are well known: al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, for his logical

works, but also such treatises as his *Book of Religion, Book*

*of Politics*, and commentary on Aristotle’s *Ethics*; Avicenna, for

his encyclopedic *al-Shifa¯ ’* (*The Healing*), but also “his book on the

*Oriental Philosophy*”; and al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, for his *Incoherence of the*

*Philosophers*, *Balance of Actions*, *The Jewel*, *The Niche for Lights*,

*Intellectual Knowledge*, *Inspiration and Reconciliation, The Highest*

*Aim*, and the *Deliverer from Error* (but surprisingly, not hismajor

work, the *Revival of the Religious Sciences*). If we add a major number

of Aristotle’s writings, we realize that Ibn T.

ufayl and his contemporaries

had access to sufficient sources for his philosophical

enterprise.

About Ibn T.

ufayl’s life not very much is known.37 His family

came from Porchena (Almer’ıa) but he was born in the village of

Guadix near Granada around 1110–16, when al-Andalus was under

Almoravid rule. He became physician and secretary to Abu¯ Sa‘ı¯d,

a son of the caliph ‘Abd al-Mu’min (1130–63) and the governor of

Granada. Later he became physician to his brother, the new caliph

Abu¯ Ya‘qu¯ bYu¯ suf (1163–84), and served theAlmohad cause alsowith

his poetry, calling the Muslims to join the Almohad forces against

the Christians. Abu Ya‘q ¯ ub and Ibn T.

ufayl were close friends, and

he introduced many scholars to the cultivated caliph, among them

Averroes, who replaced him as court physician when he retired in

1182. IbnT.

ufayl died in 1185 in Marrakech and the next caliph Abu¯

Yu¯ suf (1184–98) attended his funeral.

We cannot say that he was an outstanding figure in medicine

on the basis of the only medical work that has survived mostly

intact: his poem or *Urju¯ za* of medicine extant as a manuscript

of the Qarawiyyin library of Fez. Ibn T.

ufayl’s medical education

is linked to his knowledge of the other sciences of the Greeks,

including philosophy, which he learned from Ibn B¯ajja’s works and

from the authors mentioned above. ‘Abd al-W¯ah. id al-Marr ¯akush¯ı

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affirmed in 1224 that Ibn T.

ufayl was author of “books on philosophy,

natural sciences, and metaphysics” and mentions his *H.*

*ayy*

*ibn Yaqz. a¯n*, which expounds “the origin of the human species

according to the view of [the philosophers],” and also an *Epistle*

*on the Soul*. The same source, al-Marr ¯akush¯ı, informs us that

Ibn T.

ufayl was very keen “to harmonize wisdom with the Islamic

sciences.”38

Recent investigation has stressed Ibn T.

ufayl’s involvement with

S.

u¯ fism,which sheds important light on his thought. Al-Andaluswas

at that timeburgeoningwithS.

u¯ fı¯s, ofwhomthemost influentialwas

Muh. y¯ı al-D¯ın ibn ‘Arab¯ı (d. 1240). S.

u¯ fı¯s challenged official Islam,

as represented by Malikite jurists and Ash‘arite theologians, with

their ascetic practice and mystical teachings. They wanted to reach

a state of perfection and happiness while being in this world, a state

indescribable even in poetic language. Ibn T.

ufayl approves of this

aim, but sees that people follow different paths in order to reach

it. On the one hand, Ibn B¯ajja insisted on the path of pure reason;

Ibn T.

ufayl believes that he reached this state, but does not accept

this sort of “speculation and thinking” as sufficient. On the other

hand, the S.

u¯ fı¯s achieve the state by non-rational means, but since

many of them lack education, they speak of it only in a confused

fashion. The right path is the one Ibn T.

ufayl finds in Avicenna’s

“oriental wisdom,” which requires philosophical education andS.

u¯ fı¯

training.39

To explain his doctrine, IbnT.

ufayl had several choices, including

poetry. One was the scholarly genre of Avicenna’s encyclopedic

works. Another option was the allegorical genre ofAvicenna’s *Epistle*

*ofH.*

*ayy ibn Yaqz. a¯n*,40 in which a wise man representing the Active

Intellect goes on an allegorical journey. Ibn T.

ufayl instead chose

the form of a novel, or better, a tale, so as to add verisimilitude to

the account. He gave it the same title as the Avicennian allegory and

added to it “on the secrets of the orientalwisdom,” another reference

to Avicenna. The three characters of the tale bear names borrowed

from Avicennian works: the protagonist H.

ayy ibn Yaqz. ¯an, and his

equals Abs¯ al and Sal¯am¯an.41 Since the development of the story corresponds

to the order and division of knowledge, it seems advisable

to retain its order of exposition here. (Ibn T.

ufayl does not devote a

chapter to logic, but logical method is applied by the protagonist in

the first part of his research.)

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*The search for the origins of human life*

The tale begins with the birth of the protagonist, and Ibn T.

ufayl

leaves us the choice between two versions: first, that the sister

of a jealous island king secretly marries a neighbor called Yaqz. ¯an

(“the Awake”) and bears him a child. Out of fear that her brother

would kill the newborn, she places him in an ark upon the ocean,

which is carried to another deserted island and runs ashore. The

child’s cries of hunger are heard by a gazelle that has lost her

fawn, and this gazelle raises him. This echoes the story of Moses in

Exodus as transmitted by the Qur’ ¯an (20:39). The second version

is the one preferred by Ibn T.

ufayl, the scientist and physician. On

the island there is a depressed moist place where a mass of clay

begins to “ferment”; the process generates a very small bubble42

divided into two parts, separated by a fine membrane and filled with

subtle *pneuma*, a substance able to receive the soul that God creates.

Avicenna’s influence may be seen from the fact that the soul

emanates from God and is compared with the sun’s light. As usual,

Ibn T.

ufayl does not mention his sources, and prefers to introduce

Qur’ ¯anic quotations, for instance “the soul coming from your Lord”

(17:85).

Once the soul is attached to the embryonic bubble all the faculties

are subordinated to its authority. Altogether, three bubbles are

generated, yielding three organs: the heart is the most important as

the center of natural heat, the liver supplies it with fuel, and the

brain tells it what to take in and expel. Following Galen, IbnT.

ufayl

should have included the testes, but he suppresses allusions to sexuality.

Once all the organs were built, the enveloping mud dries and

breaks up, and the child is born. From here on, both versions about

H.

ayy’s origin merge together.

IbnT.

ufayl divides the life of his hero into stages of seven years.43

In his first septennial, H.

ayy grows with the gazelle and her brood.

He learns their language and also the singing of the birds and sounds

of other animals. IbnT.

ufayl evokes here a happy coexistence of man

and nature, a recurrent theme in the narrative.H.

ayy realizes his inferiority

in front of the animals, which are stronger, faster, and better

protected by nature than he is. Here IbnT.

ufayl draws on the *Encyclopedia*

of the Brethren of Purity, and its discussion of the superiority

of animals.

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The death of the gazelle gives the physician IbnT.

ufayl an opportunity

to digress on the heart as the center of life.H.

ayy ventures to

dissect the dead gazelle, finds her heart, and observes that it has two

cavities, the one to the right full of coagulated blood and the other

to the left empty. H.

ayy infers that her death was caused because

the substance filling it disappeared, and that such a substance is

superior, and master and mover of the body. He then generalizes the

conclusion as being valid for all beings. We observe that H.

ayy systematically

applies a logical method to discover the essence and the

cause of what he sees.

H.

ayy comes to the conclusion that the departed substance is fiery

and spends his third septennial watching nature in search of the principle

of life. When a wildfire breaks out, he is amazed by the qualities

of fire and decides to keep it alive in his cave. Despite its

practical utility, he focuses on the theoretical aspects of fire: by

analogy H. ayy reasons that fire and the substance evaporated in the

left side of the heart of the gazelle belong to the same category,

but he needs proof, and decides to undertake vivisection of an animal.

Upon opening the heart, he finds in the left cavity a white

vapor, very hot, whose disappearance causes the animal’s death.

He infers that this was the animal *pneuma*, or spirit, ruling the

body.

The fourth septennial of H.

ayy’s life is devoted to analysis of the

sublunary world. He observes three realms within it: animal, vegetable,

and mineral, and then looks for a character common to all

kinds. He finds it to be corporeality, and that every body is distinguished

by being either heavy or light. IbnT.

ufayl lets his character

adopt the Aristotelian doctrine that all sublunary beings are composed

of two principles, matter and form, but follows Avicenna in

rejecting a purely potential prime matter. Matter is always informed

by the three dimensions and is always united to corporeal form

(Arabic 70, English 125). Yet he observes the simplest bodies and

sees that their essences can desert them. Water is cold and heavy

(note, not cold and moist, as Aristotle said) and can become hot, and

even light. As soon as it loses one of its primary qualities, it loses its

“watery form” and acquires another form. H.

ayy discovers that all

forms in nature are of this kind: they are generated temporally and

“*by necessity of the intellect*, he knew that every generated being

needs a generator and by means of this consideration, the agent of

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the form was drawn in his soul” (Arabic 73, English 127, emphasis

added).

H.

ayy’s reasoning, however, is twofold. For him form is only a disposition

or ability to cause some motions and not others. Assuming

this definition, whatever bestows the form upon the corporeal matter

bestows also the actions proper to such a form. Therefore the true

agent is not the immediate one, but the “creator of the form,” a doctrine

IbnT.

ufayl confirms by citing the Qur’ ¯an.H.

ayy is twenty-eight

years old when he deduces the necessity and the existence of a first

efficient Cause, and thereafter he endeavors to identify it. Since the

sublunary world is wholly subject to the process of coming-to-be and

passing-away, he focuses on the supralunary world. H.

ayy observes

the circular movements of the heavenly bodies, and concludes that

together they constitute one spherical body of limited dimensions,

and that the universe is similar to a living being. Ibn T.

ufayl shows

contempt for the sublunary world with a curious comparison to the

belly of the universe: the animal belly “contains excrement and fluids,

in which other animals are frequently generated, as they are

generated in the macrocosm” (Arabic 80, English 130).

*The search for the Creator and union with him*

On the issue of whether the universe is eternal, Ibn T.

ufayl has a

difficult choice between al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, the Ash‘arite theologian, who

was well respected by the Almohads, and his philosophical exemplar

Avicenna. H.

ayy tries to answer questions that we know al-

Ghaz¯ al¯ı had raised against the philosophers in *The Incoherence of*

*the Philosophers*, but without success. When this inquiry “leaves

himexhausted” he escapes the antinomy by showing that the consequences

of both positions are the same. He does this by first assuming

the hypothesis that the world is created in time and coming to the

necessity of an agent who could bring it into existence, and who cannot

be a body. Then he assumes the hypothesis of an eternal world,

realizes that its movement is eternal too, so that it needs an eternal

mover, and concludes that such a mover must be incorporeal.

Ibn T.

ufayl’s arguments both draw on other philosophers, but he is

original in adopting this conciliatory position.

IbnT.

ufayl refers to two further demonstrations of God’s existence.

One is based on the composition of matter and formin all sublunary

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beings and on the fact that they “subsist only because of form.”H.

ayy

infers that if these beings need the formto exist, theAgent bestowing

the formupon them bestows their existence and is their Creator. The

second demonstration is based on the limited and finite nature of the

world and its parts, and its need for an infinite power to sustain its

existence. IbnT.

ufayl admits that their relationship is one of temporal

simultaneity, although the cause is ontologically prior to the effect.

Both arguments belong to the emanationist tradition, represented by

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and Avicenna, but in order to endorse the position that the

universe is caused and created by thisAgentwithout time, IbnT.

ufayl

prefers to quote the Qur’ ¯an: “When he wants anything he only has

to say ‘Be’ and it is” (36:82).44 At this stage of knowledge H. ayy has

reached the age of thirty-five, and fulfilled his fifth septennial.

During the next two periods of seven years, H.

ayy mainly concentrates

his efforts on reaching mystical union with the Creator

by considering the divine essence and attributes. As we read in

Avicenna, God is the Necessary Existent. His existence has no other

cause and he is the cause of all other existents. Ibn T.

ufayl emphasizes

God’s incorporeality in order to establish the incorporeality

of the human soul. God’s incorporeality belongs to his essence and

whatever knows an incorporeal essence must also be incorporeal:

It became evident to him [H. ayy] that he apprehended this Being by means

of his own essence and that the knowledge of His essence was engraved

in his own. It became evident to him that the essence by means of which

he apprehended [God] was something incorporeal, for which none of the

corporeal attributes was acceptable.45

But we should not be too enthusiastic about the conclusion, and he

admonishes the reader that not all souls are immortal. As al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı

already made clear,46 those souls that never reach any knowledge of

the Necessary Being while attached to their bodies do not survive

the death of the body. As for the souls who know God but deviated

from him, they will survive but will be punished, eternally or for

a limited time according to their sins. The souls of those men who

knew the Necessary Existent and devoted themselves to him will

survive and be eternally blessed enjoying his vision, because their

own perfection consists of the vision of the Necessary Being.

Ibn T.

ufayl’s arguments lead to the conclusion that the state of

mystical union man is longing for will be possible in the afterlife,

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but he also wants to allow for its possibility in this life. His hero

achieves this state – we are not informed how – and wants not only

to reach it but also to enjoy it in a continuous way.

*The breaking point:S.*

*u¯ fism prevails*

H.

ayy has enjoyed the vision of the Necessary Being for an instant,

but cannot achieve it permanently because his senses, his imagination,

and his body hinder him. He does not give up his endeavor and

searches for beings capable of continuous access to the Necessary

Being in order to imitate them, finding that only the heavenly bodies

show continuity and regularity in their movements. From this

observation he draws the following analogy: if he has been able to

reach a fleeting intuition despite his body, the stars and the heavenly

spheres in which they reside are no doubt capable of a continuous

vision.H.

ayy needs to know if his own nature is like theirs and sees

that the spiritual animal in it resembles these heavenly bodies, insofar

as he is a self-mover, and unlike the four elements has no form

that would make him move up and down; he can also move circularly.

He infers that if he imitates the heavens, he may acquire their

ability to see the Necessary Being permanently.

This requires conscious preparation. Since man’s nature is threefold,

having purely animal, spiritual animal (like the heavens), and

purely spiritual aspects, H.

ayy must subordinate the first aspect to

the second and then both of these to the spiritual. This means leading

an ascetic life but also a life respecting the divine order set in

nature, for instance, abstaining from meat in his diet. As for the second

stage of becoming close to a heavenly body, he must perform

three kinds of actions, directed toward the inferior world, toward

himself, and toward the Necessary Being: he must be compassionate

toward the inferior world of plants and animals, with regard

to himself he must be extremely clean and spin around quickly,

just as the heavens rotate, and he must concentrate his thought

on the Creator, in order to lose his personality and dissolve within

him.

We should notice that Ibn T.

ufayl simply assumes that the heavenly

spheres are intelligences, and that they are the pattern to be

imitated. Even if such a doctrine is accepted, there remains the central

issue of how to enjoy a permanent vision of the Necessary Being.

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IbnT.

ufayl explains thatH.

ayy goes to the point of losing his individual

consciousness and obliterating himself, so that:

He devoted himself entirely to the vision of the Truth, and when he succeeded,

everything, the heavens, the earth and everything between them,

vanished from his memory and his intellect. All spiritual forms, and corporeal

faculties, and all the powers separated from matter which are the

essences that know the true Being, and even his own essence vanished.47

The reader may here expect the end of the tale but Ibn T.

ufayl has

prepared a surprise for us: after arriving at this point,H.

ayy leads us

through a celestial promenade.Without any logical or empirical justification

we are informed thatH.

ayy first sees the outermost sphere

the essence of which is like “the image of the sun reflected on a

polished mirror,” where the sun symbolizes the Necessary Being.

Thereafter he contemplates the following spheres, those of the fixed

stars and the planets, and the corresponding intelligences. Eventually

he descends into the sublunary world, where the Active Intellect

endows matterwith different forms. Although human souls also proceed

from the Active Intellect, their destiny varies.H.

ayy sees souls

of bodies that have passed away, many of them “like dirty mirrors”:

the souls of the damned, suffering endless torture. Others shine with

infinite beauty and happiness, and the soul ofH.

ayy is among them.

Many souls simply vanish along with their bodies.

The resulting knowledge is the same in content as the fruits of

his inquiry before mystical union, but it is qualitatively different,

because nowH.

ayy *contemplates* and sees (*sha¯hada, ra’a¯* ) divine reality,

with no need of discursive reasoning; the objects appear to him

under a new perspective, with intense clarity.48 ButH.

ayy wakes up

from his visionary experience and finds himself thrown again into

this world. Repetition of his exercises allows him to reach the mystical

state more easily and for increasingly longer periods of time. At

this stage he has completed his seventh septennial.

*Conclusion: the defense of S. u¯ fı¯ and*

*philosophical activity*

IbnT.

ufayl now dealswith issues onwhich he could be accused of heterodoxy,

allowingH.

ayy to discover Islam. This occurs in the formof

H.

ayy’s meeting with Abs¯ al and Sal¯am¯an, residents of a neighboring

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island. Although at the beginning Ibn T.

ufayl does not refer to their

religion as Islamic, it becomes soon evident:

One of them, Abs¯ al, tried to penetrate the hidden meaning [of the revealed

religion] and to unveil its mystical content . . . Sal¯am¯an adhered to the external

meaning and refrained from any allegorical interpretation. Both nevertheless

zealously complied with the external practices, the examination of

their conscience and fighting the passions.49

Because of the sharp differences between the two, Abs¯ al decides to

move to the island whereH.

ayy lives, to pursue allegorical interpretation

of the Holy Book.H.

ayy first sees him at prayer and immediately

recognizes Abs¯ al as a fellow human being. Mastering Abs¯ al’s

language,H.

ayy is able to communicate to him all the knowledge he

has acquired without any teacher, without any revealed book, solely

by means of human reason.H.

ayy and Abs¯ al, symbols of natural reason

and revealed wisdom, illustrate the agreement of both kinds of

knowledge.

H.

ayy embraces Islam (which is still not identified explicitly), its

doctrines and practices, but has two main objections to it: why does

the Prophet employ images and allegories instead of expressions

revealing the divine truth, and why does the Prophet allow his followers

to strive for material goods (Arabic 146–7, English 161)? The

use of images and the search for wealth both prevent men from coming

close to God. These objections lead to the final section of the

book: in order to move Muslims to the true Islam, IbnT.

ufayl needs

to address political issues as well.H.

ayy goes with his friend Abs¯ al to

the island where Sal¯am¯an rules, but fails completely in his endeavor

to lead the citizens to the right path. We need not assume that the

Almohad sultan is the sole addressee; the ending could apply to all

Muslimrulers, so that IbnT.ufayl levels a general critique at Muslim

society, as did theS.

u¯ fı¯s.

Although al-Marr ¯akush¯ı said that the aim of Ibn T.

ufayl in this

work was to prove the harmony between Islam and human wisdom,

the issue is treated only in passing, leaving the impression that

the work is mainly apologetic, designed to justify philosophy and

S.

u¯ fism. Themain objective is no doubt the achievement ofmystical

union, and the development of both the tale and the philosophical

doctrine culminate in this. Nevertheless the belief underlying all

his thought seems very different: Ibn al-Khat.¯ıb (d. 1375) counted Ibn

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T.

ufayl among those who consider that human reason (*fit.*

*ra*) has the

capacity to know the Truth by means of logical demonstrations, who

think that prophets are not necessary, and that the knowledge of God

resides in the soul.50 On this interpretation H.

ayy is the symbol for

humankind and his story shows how human reason must proceed:

using the logical method and correct reasoning. Yet his goal remains

mystical union, and philosophy helps man achieve this only insofar

as it could tellH.

ayy: “I have brought you to a point where you have to

take another guide.” Ibn T.

ufayl sees philosophy as establishing the

need for mystical union, as explaining how it is possible, and even as

something necessary to avoid confusion on the way, but he does not

admit that the mystical state is a part or result of the philosophical

inquiry itself.

Therefore we may agreewith Ibn al-Khat.¯ıb on the implicit purpose

of IbnT.

ufayl’s *Epistle ofH.*

*ayy Ibn Yaqz. a¯n*, namely, the autonomous

capacity of human intelligence, but insist that this capacity has to

include S.

¯ uf¯ı practice as well as logical reasoning. Moreover S.

u¯ fism

is presented as the essential means to attaining the state of mystical

experience. Still, because after achieving this state mankind will

contemplate the same immaterial forms it had discovered by reasoning,

but now in a direct vision, it is tempting to think that this

vision is the fruit of rationality, and that S.

u¯ fism is superfluous to

this purpose.

Ibn B¯ajja and IbnT.

ufayl thus shared a firm belief in the power of

the human mind, as well as a mistrust in the society of al-Andalus,

which was losing territory against its Christian enemies even as

it lost interest in the sciences, including philosophy. As we have

seen, there are major differences between them: Ibn B¯ajja adhered to

Aristotelianism, while Ibn T.

ufayl preferred Avicenna’s innovative

philosophy. Ibn B¯ajja sustained the possibility of attaining happiness

as a result of intellectual activity, IbnT.

ufayl found it in S.u¯ fı¯ experience.

They both placed man in the center of their concerns, as they

wanted to help himto achieve his perfection – that is, his happiness –

within a framework not opposed to religion but independent of it.

They differed over how this perfection might be reached, and even

what it would consist in.

They both were influential: the fact that S.

u¯ fı¯s in al-Andalus and

elsewhere would henceforth try to integrate philosophical elements

into their doctrines is thanks in no small part to Ibn T.

ufayl. As for

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Ibn B¯ajja, there can be little doubt that his influence upon the young

Averroes was decisive for the latter’s understanding of Aristotle, and

above all, for making many major issues of philosophical inquiry

clear to the Cordovan Aristotelian.

notes

1 *T.*

*abaqa¯ t al-umam*, ed. H. Mou’nes (Cairo: 1998), 96–108.

2 On whom see J. M. Milla’ s, *Selomo´ Ibn Gabirol, como poeta y filo´ sofo*

(Grenada: 1993), S. Pessin, “Jewish Neoplatonism: Being Above Being

and Divine Emanation in Solomon Ibn Gabirol and Isaac Israeli,” in

Frank and Leaman [234], 91–110, and further references given there.

3 On Ibn B¯ajja’s life, see J. Lomba, *Avempace* (Zaragoza: 1989); D. M.

Dunlop, “Remarks on the Life and Works of Ibn B¯ajja, Avempace,” in

*Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Congress of Orientalists* (Leiden:

1957), 188–96. His full name was Abu¯ Bakr Muh. ammad ibn Yah. ya¯ ibn

al-S. a¯ ’igh ibn Ba¯ jja at-Tu¯ jı¯bı¯.

4 *Muwashshaha* is a genre of poetry composed of a main body in classical

Arabic and a final part in vernacular Arabic or Romance.

5 *Mu’allafa¯ t Ibn Ba¯ jja* (Beirut: 1983), esp. 77–81.

6 Partial edn. and Engl. trans. by D. M. Dunlop, *Journal of the Royal*

*Asiatic Society* (1945), 61–81. Full edn. and Spanish trans. by M. As’ın

Palacios, *El r ´egimen del solitario* (Madrid: 1946). New edn. by Fakhry

in Ibn B¯ajja [128], 37–96. Partial English trans. by L. Berman, “The

Governance of the Solitary,” in Lerner and Mahdi [189], 122–33. New

Spanish trans. by J. Lomba (Madrid: 1997). Edn. and Italian trans. by M.

Campanini, *Il regime del solitario* (Rome: 2002).

7 Arabic edn. and Spanish trans. by M. As’ın Palacios, “Un texto de

Avempace sobre la uni ’on del intelecto con el hombre,” in *Al-Andalus*

7 (1942), 1–47. Ed. in Ibn B¯ajja [128], 153–73.

8 “Carta del adi ’ os,” *Al-Andalus* 8 (1943), 1–87. Ed. in Ibn B¯ajja [128],

113–43.

9 *Ta‘ ¯ al¯ıq Ibn B¯ ajja ‘al ¯ a mant. iq Arist.*

*u¯* , ed. M. Fakhry (Beirut: 1994). Ed.

M. T. Da¯nesh-Pazˇu¯ h, *Al-mant. iqiyya¯ t li-al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯*, vol. III (Qom: 1990),

3–219.

10 Edn. and English trans. by D. M. Dunlop in *Islamic Quarterly* 3 (1956),

117–38.

11 *Ih.s.*

*a¯ ’ al-‘ulu¯m*, ed. A. Gonza’ lez Palencia, *Clasificacio´n de las ciencias*

(Madrid: 1953).

12 *Ta‘a¯ lı¯q*, 27.

13 *Ta‘a¯ lı¯q*, 28.

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14 Ibid.

15 For this traditional view of the *Organon* see Black [170].

16 *Ta‘a¯ lı¯q*, 50.

17 The addition of this sixth term is attributed to the Brethren of Purity.

See Netton [82], 47–8.

18 Pines was first to underline the different meaning of *quwwa* in Ibn

B¯ajja and Aristotle: see his “La dynamique d’Ibn B¯ajja,” in *M´ elanges*

*Alexandre Koyr´e*, vol. II (Paris: 1964), 442–68; repr. in Pines [36],

450–74.

19 See M. Wolff, “Philoponus and the Rise of Preclassical Dynamics,” and

F. W. Zimmermann, “Philoponus’ Impetus Theory in the Arabic Tradition,”

in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian*

*Science* (London: 1987), 84–120 and 121–9.

20 *Sharh. al-sama¯ ‘ al-t.abı¯‘ı¯*, 114. Simplicius already spoke of this minimal

amount; see *CAG* X, 1108–10.

21 *Sharh. al-sama¯ ‘ al-t.abı¯‘ı¯*, 116.

22 A. Maier, *Studien zur Naturphilosophie der Spa¨ tscholastik*, 5 vols.

(1943–58), esp. vol. V (Rome: 1958); E. A. Moody, “Galileo and

Avempace: The Dynamics of the Leaning Tower Experiment,” *Journal*

*of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951), 163–93 and 375–422.

23 Ed. J. al-Dı¯n al-‘Alawı¯, *Rasa¯ ’il falsafiyya li-Abı¯ Bakr Ibn Ba¯ jja* (Beirut:

1983), 135–9. The epistle is a late work, where Ibn B¯ajja refers to the

*Rule of the Solitary,* the *Epistle of Farewell*, and other writings.

24 Ibn B¯ajja [128], 155–6. See also his epistle on unity and on the one, in

*Rasa¯ ’il falsafiyya*, ed. al-‘Alawı¯, 140–9. The obvious precedent is al-

F¯ar ¯ab¯ı’s treatise on unity, *Kit ¯ ab al-w¯ ah.*

*id wa al-wah.*

*da*, ed. M. Mahdi

(Casablanca: 1989).

25 The doctrine is expounded in the *Book on Coming-to-Be and Passing-*

*Away*: 1 edn. of M. S.

. H.

. Ma‘s.

u¯mı¯ in the journal *Majallat majma‘ allugha*

*al-‘arab¯ıya bi-Dimashq* 42 (1967), 255–74 and 426–50. Ed. and

Spanish trans. by J. Puig Montada (Madrid: 1995).

26 See the *Book of the Soul*, ed. M. S.

. H.

. Ma‘s.

u¯mı¯ in *Majallat majma‘*

*al-lugha al-‘arab¯ıya bi-Dimashq* 34 (1959), 655–6; his Engl. trans.

(Karachi: 1961), 106–7.

27 *Al-qawl f¯ı al-s.*

*uwar al-ru¯ h. a¯niyya*, in Ibn Ba¯ jja [128], 49–96.

28 Ibid., 49. (For the notion of “intentions” (*ma‘a¯nı¯*), see below, chapter

15.)

29 Ibid., 55.

30 *Rule of the Solitary*, ed. Fakhry, 79–80; trans. Berman, 131–2.

31 SeeWalzer [77], 252–5. The Platonic antecedent is *Republic* 445d–573c.

32 *Rule of the Solitary*, ed. Fakhry, 41; trans. Berman, 126.

33 Harvey [126].

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34 See the introductory study ofM. Campanini in the aforementioned version

of the *Rule of the Solitary*, with references to studies by E. I. J.

Rosenthal, O. Leaman, S. Harvey, and others.

35 *Ittis.a¯ l al-‘aql bi-al-insa¯n*, ed. Fakhry, 166.

36 Ed. and French Ibn T.

ufayl [129], at 12–13. English trans. in Goodman

[131]. Partial trans. by George N. Atiyeh in Lerner and Mahdi [189],

134–62. Citations are to Gauthier’s edition followed by citation of the

Goodman translation.

37 Modern studies of import are Gauthier [130], Conrad [123], and ‘¯A.

al-‘Ir ¯aq¯ı, *Al-m¯ıt ¯ af¯ız¯ıq¯ a f¯ı falsafa IbnT.*

*ufayl* (Cairo: 1995).

38 *Al-Mu‘jib f¯ı talkh¯ıs.*

*akhba¯ r al-Maghrib*, ed. R. Dozy (Leiden: 1881),

172–5; ed. M. S. al-‘Ary¯an and M. al-‘Arab¯ı al-‘Ilm¯ı (Cairo: 1949), 239–

42. French trans. by E. Fagnan, *Histoire des Almohades de Merra¯kechi*

(Algiers: 1893), 207–9.

39 To be precise: this is how IbnT.

ufayl interprets Avicenna, a false interpretation

according to D. Gutas, “IbnT.

ufayl on Ibn S¯ın¯a’s Eastern Philosophy,”

*Oriens* 34 (1994), 222–241.

40 Ed.A. F. Mehren, *Trait ´es mystiques d’Abou Ali al-Hosain ben Abdallah*

*ben Sina ou Avicenne*, fasc. 1: *Ris ¯ ala H.*

*ayy Ibn Yaqz. a¯n* (Leiden: 1889),

1–23. French trans. by A-M. Goichon, *Le re´cit de H. ayy Ibn Yaqz. a¯n*,

(Paris: 1959). Spanish trans. by M. Cruz Hern’andez, *Tres escritos*

*esot ´ericos de Avicenna: Ris ¯ ala de H.*

*ayy Ibn Yaqz. a¯n, R. del pa´ jaro,*

*Qas. ¯ıda del alma* (Madrid: 1998).

41 The story of Sala¯ma¯n and Absa¯ l is printed in Avicenna, *Tis‘ rasa¯ ’il fı¯*

*al-h. ikma wa al-t.ab¯ı‘iyy ¯ at wa qis.s.*

*at Sal ¯ am¯ an wa Abs ¯ al*, ed. H.

. ‘A¯ s.ı¯

(Beirut: 1986), 125–39, and is ascribed toH.

unayn ibn Ish. ¯aq.

42 For the Aristotelian origins of the doctrine see R. Kruk, “A Frothy

Bubble: Spontaneous Generation in the Medieval Islamic Tradition,”

*Journal of Semitic Studies* 35 (1990), 265–82.

43 The kind of division of human life into periods of seven years is of

ancient origin: it is already attested in Solon’s elegy, which organized

the life of man in ten septennials, see fr. 19 (27) in E. Diehl, *Anthologia*

*Lyrica Graeca*, 3rd edn. (Leipzig: 1949), 38–40. A book on the subject

ascribed to Hippocrates, *De Septimannis*, was known in Arabic; cf. H.

Roscher, *Die hippokratische Schrift von der Siebenzahl in ihrer vierfachen*

*U¨ berlieferung* (Paderborn: 1913).

44 There is a third proof from the wisdom and beauty found in creation,

which requires a Creator from whom wisdom, beauty, and all other

qualities emanate (Arabic 89, English 134).

45 Arabic 92, English 135–6. IbnT.

ufayl’s words evokeDescartes’ reasoning

toward the end of the third *Meditation*: “superest tantum ut examinem

qua ratione ideam istam a Deo accepi.”

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46 Walzer [77], 270–3.

47 Arabic 120, English 148–9. The phenomenon is known in the mystic

terminology as *fana¯ ’*. See for instance its definition by an early mystic,

al-Junayd (d. 910) in A. H. Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality and*

*Writings of al-Junayd* (London: 1962), 31–9 (Arabic) and 152–9 (English).

48 The intrusion of the mystical stage in the story is problematic: H.

ayy

first arrives at his state of mystical dissolution by means of ascetic

practices, so that his philosophical effort is only of auxiliary value. And

now he gains knowledge of the immaterial world with no effort. What

need is there, then, for philosophy? Ibn T.

ufayl relies here on a faulty

interpretation of Avicenna’s doctrine of intuition, where intuition is

not contrasted to rational thought.

49 Arabic 136–7, English 156.

50 Ibn al-Kh¯at.ib, *Rawd.a al-ta‘r¯ıf bi-al-h. ubb al-shar¯ıf*, ed. ‘A. al-Q¯adir

Ah. mad ‘At. ¯a’ (Cairo: n.d.), 275–6; ed.M. al-Katt¯an¯ı (Beirut: 1970), 280–3.

Ibn al-Khat.¯ıb was, of course, against the view, but the philosophers of

the Enlightenment will celebrate it. Leibniz saw it as fully compatible

with a deep understanding of the Divinity: see his letter to Abb’eNicaise,

in *Die philosophischen Schriften von G. W. Leibniz*, ed. C. J. Gerhard,

vol. II (Berlin: 1879), 563 (Letter 12, Feb. 15, 1697).

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richard c. taylor

9 Averroes: religious dialectic and

Aristotelian philosophical

thought

Abu¯ al-Walı¯d Muh. ammad ibn Ah.mad ibn Muh. ammad ibn Rushd

(ca. 1126–98), who came to be known in the Latin West as Averroes,

was born at Cordoba into a family prominent for its expert devotion

to the study and development of religious law (*shar‘¯ıa*). In Arabic

sources al-H. af¯ıd (“the Grandson”) is added to his name to distinguish

him from his grandfather (d. 1126), a famous Malikite jurist

who served the ruling Almoravid regime as *qa¯dı¯* (judge) and even as

*ima¯m*(prayer leader and chief religious authority) at themagnificent

Great Mosque which still stands today in the city of Averroes’ birth

andwhereAverroes himself served asGrand*Qa¯dı¯* (chief judge).When

the governing regime changed with the success of ‘Abd al-Mu’min

(r. 1130–63), founder of the Almohad (*al-Muwah.h.idu¯ n*) dynasty, the

members of the family continued to flourish under a new religious

orientation based on the teachings of the reformer, al-Mah. d¯ı ibn

Tu¯mart (d. ca. 1129–30).Although insistent on the strict adherence to

religious law, Ibn Tu¯mart’s teachings were at the same time equally

insistent on the essential rationality of human understanding of the

existence and unity (*tawh. ¯ıd*) of God and his creation as well as the

rationality of the Qur’ ¯an and its interpretation. This approach was

embraced – even exploited – by Averroes in his own writings on

dialectical theology and thereby played a role in the development of

his thought on the nature of religious law and revelation in relation

to philosophy founded on the powers of natural reason. Considerations

of family, history, and contemporary religious doctrine play

roles in the thought of other philosophical thinkers presented in this

volume, but in the case ofAverroes his times and his various appointments

at Seville and Cordoba as *qa¯dı¯* seemto havemelded in special

ways with his understanding of Aristotle and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı. Over the

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short period of 1179–81 he propounded publicly his controversial

views on religion and natural reason in four important dialectical

works: the so-called *Decisive Treatise*, the *Explanation of the Sorts*

*of Proofs in the Doctrines of Religion* (*al-Kashf ‘an al-mana¯hij*), a

*D.*

*am¯ıma* or *Appendix on Divine Knowledge* usually understood as

attached to the *Decisive Treatise*, and his famous *Incoherence of*

*the Incoherence* written as a commentary on and response to al-

Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s *Incoherence of the Philosophers*. In these compositions,

Averroes is a thinker dynamically engaged with religious issues,

working out a coherent account of matters of relevance to both religion

and philosophy. The dynamism of his thought is also apparent

in another way in philosophical works where he changed views on a

number of issues, among them the nature of divine causality in the

world and the vexing problem of providing a coherent and cogent

account of human knowing and the role of the receptive human

material intellect.

The philosophical works of Averroes range in size from short treatises

on specific issues of logic, physics, psychology, *et alia* to his

three sorts of commentaries on major works of the Aristotelian corpus.

His *Short Commentaries*, usually considered early, consist of

epitomizing accounts of Aristotelian doctrines, often substantially

based on discussions in the accounts of commentators of the Greek

tradition.1 The *Middle Commentaries* more often have the form of

a clarifying and simplifying paraphrase of the Aristotelian text, and

for that reason are thought likely to arise in response to the request

of his patron, Abu¯ Ya‘qu¯ b Yu¯ suf, for help in understanding the works

of Aristotle. The late *Long Commentaries*, consisting of the entire

text of Aristotle divided into sections followed by detailed commentary,

are generally thought to contain his most mature thought. The

first of these was the *Long Commentary on the “PosteriorAnalytics”*

(ca. 1180–3). Following in measured succession were Long Commentaries

on the *De Anima* (ca. 1186?), on the *Physics* (1186), on the *De*

*Caelo* (1188), and on the *Metaphysic*s (1190). As will be discussed

below, Averroes himself held that truth, not as grasped *per accidens*

by the methods of persuasion or dialectic, but in its fullest sense as

*per se*, is to be found in his “books of demonstration,”2 that is, in his

philosophical works and in particular his commentaries on Aristotle

which he held to be substantially composed of philosophical demonstrations.

Through translations into Hebrew the work of Averroes

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had a very substantial influence on the development of medieval

Jewish philosophical thought. The works translated included the

*Decisive Treatise*, the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, several *Short*

*Commentaries*,*Middle Commentaries* on the *Physics*, *De Caelo*, *De*

*Anima*, *Metaphysics*, and more, and the *Long Commentaries* on the

*Posterior Analytics* and *Physics*.3 It is particularly significant that

the *Long Commentarie*s on the *De Anima* and on the *Metaphysics*

were not included, since these contain his final positions on soul,

intellect, and personal immortality as well as on God and the nature

of metaphysical science. Yet it is because of translations from Arabic

into Latin in the thirteenth century that Averroes is a widely recognized

figure in the history of philosophy today. This early wave of

translations, many by Michael Scot, who worked in Toledo and in

Sicily at the court of Frederick II, were for the most part of philosophical

commentaries and did not include his works of dialectical

argumentation relevant to religion. Averroes’ thought continued to

draw the attention of Western thinkers, and interest was reinforced

by a second wave of translations and the printing of his translated

workswith those of Aristotle.4 No such intense interest in the works

and thought of Averroes was maintained in the Arabic philosophical

milieu of the Middle Ages.

religious dialectic and philosophy

Much philosophical confusion has arisen regarding the interpretation

of the religious and philosophical thought of Averroes, oftentimes

due to factors extraneous to his own work. Since the emergence

of interest in Averroes broadly in the Arab world following

the appearance of Renan’s 1852 work, in some cases the writings

and figure of Averroes have been used in blatant manipulation, with

little if any regard to the genuine sense of his thought, to champion

many diverse causes from socialism and Marxism to nationalism

and more recently to promote the harmony of religion and rationality

in the face of rising anti-rational Islamic fundamentalism.5 In

other cases, however, confusion has been due to the lack of access

to or consultation of the complete corpus of his works, while in still

others it has been due to confusion in the interpretation of doctrine

and texts. This latter has been particularly evident in regard to the

issue of the relation of philosophy and religion and the imputation

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to Averroes himself of the doctrine of “Double Truth” that is often

claimed to have arisen in the Latin West.6 Careful consideration of

Averroes’ methodology as expounded and employed in his dialectical

works will show that imputation to be incorrect and will also

valuably set the stage for consideration of his strictly philosophical

work.

In the *Incoherence of the Incoherence* Averroes makes it clear

that the discussions of philosophical topics recounted in that work

should not be regarded as definitive accounts of his views. He also

remarks on the nature of statements set forth in that work:

All this is the theory of the philosophers on this problem and in the way

we have stated it here with its proofs, it is a persuasive not a demonstrative

statement. It is for you to inquire about these questions in the places

where they are treated in the books of demonstration, if you are one of the

people of complete happiness (*al-sa‘a¯da al-ta¯mma*) and if you are one of

those who learn the arts the function of which is proof. For the demonstrative

arts are very much like the practical; for just as a man who is not a

craftsman cannot perform the function of craftsmanship, in the same way

it is not possible for him who has not learned the arts of demonstration

to perform the function of demonstration which is demonstration itself:

indeed this is still more necessary for this art than for any other – and this

is not generally acknowledged in the case of this practice only because it

is a mere act – and therefore such a demonstration can proceed only from

one who has learned the art. The kinds of statements, however, are many,

some demonstrative, others not, and since non-demonstrative statements

can be adduced without knowledge of the art, it was thought that thismight

also be the case with demonstrative statements; but this is a great error.

And therefore in the spheres of the demonstrative arts, no other statement

is possible but a technical statement which only the student of this art

can bring, just as is the case with the art of geometry. Nothing therefore

of what we have said in this book is a technical demonstrative proof; they

are all non-technical statements, some of them having greater persuasion

than others, and it is in this spirit that what we have written here must be

understood.7

Demonstrative statements have a formal structure, insofar as they

are the necessary conclusions of demonstrative arguments which

are technically sound and yield knowledge for the one who formed

the arguments and drew the conclusions. As Averroes knew well,

Aristotle held demonstrations to be valid syllogisms based on

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premises which are true, primary, and immediate as well as more

known than, prior to, and causes of the conclusion (*Posterior Analytics*,

I.2, 71b18–24). Syllogisms based on invalid technical form or on

premises not meeting these criteria are not demonstrative and not

productive of knowledge, however persuasive they may be. While

demonstrations may build upon conclusions of other demonstrations,

these statements based on non-demonstrative arguments may

turn out to be true, but they would be so in a merely accidental

way and not *per se*. For the practitioner of demonstration conclusions

are necessary and known and, as such, are also persuasive; for

the practitioner of rhetorical or dialectical argument statements cannot

be known to be true on the basis of the reasoning given in the

account. The syllogism used for these sorts of arguments will be a

dialectical syllogism, a rhetorical syllogism, or a sign, says Averroes

in his *Long Commentary on the “Posterior Analytics,”* and as such

cannot be considered altogether evident or true (*al-yaq¯ın alladh¯ı f¯ı*

*al-gha¯ya* / *secundum maximam veritatem*).8 Yet, as he indicates in

the quoted passage from the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, there is

no necessity that statements be demonstrative in order for them to be

persuasive.

In his *Fas. l al-maqa¯ l* orDecisive Treatise, the full title ofwhich can

be rendered, “Book of the Distinction of Discourse and the Establishment

of the Relation of Religious Law and Philosophy,”9 persuasion

is explained as having to do with the movement of the soul in assent

(*tas.d¯ıq*). Not all forms of assent are dependent in a compelling way

on the truth of the statement to which assent is given. Following

the lead of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı regarding what are called “modes of thought”

by David Reisman in an earlier chapter of the present collection,10

Averroes distinguishes human beings with respect to their native

capacities and their methods of assent:

[T]he natures of men are on different levels with respect to assent. One

of them comes to assent through demonstration; another comes to assent

through dialectical arguments, just as firmly as the demonstrative man

through demonstration, since his nature does not contain any greater capacity;

while another comes to assent through rhetorical arguments, again just

as firmly as the demonstrative man through demonstrative argument.11

Nothing in dialectical arguments as such compels assent, though it

may be the disposition of a given person to be swayed by dialectical

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arguments based on assumed principles and so to assent with fullest

personal conviction to a certain statement or proposition. Likewise

in rhetorical arguments as such there is nothing to compel assent,

though it may be the disposition of a given person to be swayed

by emotive appeals and displays and, again, to assent with fullest

personal conviction to a certain statement or proposition. In these

cases assent voiced or otherwise evinced is not founded on the truth

or falsity of a statement or proposition as the criterion of its appropriateness.

If the conclusion of a dialectical or rhetorical argument

happens to be true, it is not because of the argument itself but because

of extraneous considerations. The truth of the conclusions, then, has

to be considered *per accidens*, not *per se*. It is only demonstration

properly so called which attains truth with necessity in its conclusion

and necessarily causes knowledge.

It is in this context that Averroes’ distinction of characters of individuals

with respect to their intellectual abilities has to be understood.

He does not assert that there are different truths for these

diverse classes of human beings. Those forwhomthe rhetorical mode

of argumentation is most fitting require the guidance of others if

they are to assent to what happens to be the truth, since neither the

premises nor the argument form as such contribute to the truth of

the conclusion. Those for whom the dialectical mode of argumentation

is most fitting are those who are misled particularly regarding

the starting points and foundations of arguments; for them to hit

upon the truth in their conclusions would require the guidance of

others who in fact know the truth of the premises. There is then no

doctrine of “Double Truth” in Averroes such that religion has its

truth and philosophy has yet another. Instead, Averroes holds for a

unity of truth when he writes in his *Decisive Treatise*, “Truth does

not contradict truth but rather is consistentwith it and bearswitness

to it.”12

This principle of the unity of truth plays a central role in Averroes’

arguments, for otherwise it would be possible to hold there to be

true propositions set forth in religion by dialectical argumentation

founded on interpretation of religious scripture but which are at the

same time incompatible with true propositions set forth in philosophy

founded on demonstration. Averroes does not hold for actual

incompatible truths to be present in the discourses or argued conclusions

of religion and philosophy. Rather, he openly acknowledges

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that, in spite of the distinct ways assent is brought about in diverse

classes of human beings, primacy has to be given to the philosophical

method of demonstration.

We affirm definitely that whenever the conclusion of a demonstration is

in conflict with the apparent meaning of Scripture [or Religious Law], that

apparent meaning admits of allegorical interpretation according to the rules

for such interpretation in Arabic. This proposition is questioned by no

Muslimand doubted by no believer. But its certainty is immensely increased

for those who have had close dealingswith this idea and put it to the test, and

made it their aimto reconcile the assertions of intellect and tradition. Indeed

we may say that whenever a statement in Scripture [or Religious Law] conflicts

in its apparent meaning with a conclusion of demonstration, if Scripture

[or Religious Law] is considered carefully, and the rest of its contents

searched page by page, there will invariably be found among the expressions

of Scripture [or Religious Law] something which in its apparent meaning

bears witness to that allegorical interpretation or comes close to bearing

witness.13

Moreover, philosophically established truths can be used to correct

theological excesses in scriptural interpretation such as the commonly

held religious notion of creation *ex nihilo* and the origination

of time. In the *Incoherence of the Incoherence* Averroes sets forth

the understanding of the metaphysical dependence of the world on

God in accord with the account of God as creator by way of final

causality which he argues in his philosophical works. God is the creator

of the universe insofar as he draws it from potentiality into the

actuality of existence and also conserves it. Such is the case without

entailing a temporal origination of the world and a starting moment

of time. God does so by being “the cause of the composition of the

parts of the world, the existence of which is in their composition,”

so that “he is the cause of their existence” and properly called agent

of the existence of the world.14 Since there cannot be two incompatible

truths, in this case Averroes finds that the dialectical theologians

moved from incorrect premises in their refusal to accept the literal

account of Scripture because

in their statements about the world [they] do not conform to the apparent

meaning of Scripture but interpret it allegorically. For it is not stated in

Scripture that God was existing with absolutely nothing else: a text to this

effect is nowhere to be found.15

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Thus,Averroes holds that the truth of religion and the truth of philosophy

are one and the same. In the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*

Averroes holds that

the religions are, according to the philosophers, obligatory, since they

lead toward wisdom in a way universal to all human beings, for philosophy

only leads a certain number of intelligent people to the knowledge of

happiness, and they therefore have to learn wisdom, whereas religions seek

the instruction of the masses generally.16

Not unlike al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, Averroes holds that the role of religion is the

education of human beings in proper social mores and conduct for

their fulfillment and happiness. Yet it is necessary for those of the

demonstrative class of philosophers to understand common religious

propositions critically.

We have already seen that Averroes’ account of the compatibility

of the eternity of the world and Scripture is founded on a precise

philosophical understanding of the issue. This issue of the eternity

of the world *a parte ante* was one of the three positions for which

al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı accused the philosophers of *kufr*, unbelief. The remaining

two were the denial of God’s knowledge of particulars and the

denial of resurrection and the afterlife. In both cases Averroes treads

carefully in his responses, but those responses are in accord with

the methodology indicated here. To the first he responds that divine

knowledge cannot be understood on the model of human knowledge,

which both in knowing particulars and in knowing universals is posterior

to things. Since divine knowledge is the cause of things, not

caused by things, the consequence is that God’s knowledge cannot

be characterized by human notions of universal or particular knowledge.

In the *D.*

*am¯ıma* he holds that demonstration shows that it is

not by some originated knowledge analogous to that of human beings

that God can be said to know particulars or universals. Recognizing

the limits of inquiry on this issue, he says, “This is the furthest

extent to which purification [of concepts] ought to be admitted.”17

He later adds that

there must be another knowledge of beings which is unqualified, the

eternal Glorious Knowledge. And how is it conceivable that the Peripatetic

philosophers could have held that the eternal Knowledge does not comprehend

particulars, when they held that It is the cause of warning in dreams,

of revelation, and of other kinds of inspiration?18

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This issue of God’s knowledge will be considered again below in a

strictly philosophical context. But what the careful student should

note here is that Averroes has affirmed that divine knowledge exists

and that it is the cause of things. These assertions are acceptable to

himon the basis of philosophical demonstration, as we shall see, and

they are acceptable as statements of dialectical religious discourse.

As he puts it, “demonstration compels the conclusion that [God]

knows things, because their issuing from him is solely due to his

knowing.” Yet, “demonstration also compels the conclusion that

God does not know things with a knowledge of the same character

as originated knowledge.”19 But given that divine knowledge is a

*tertium quid* unlike human particular or universal knowledge, “the

limits of inquiry on this issue” as dealt with here in the context

of dialectical arguments strictly preclude the explanation of exactly

what it means to say that God knows things.

Averroes’ critical interpretation of religious issues in accord with

philosophical demonstration is also found in his treatment of al-

Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s condemnation of the philosophers for denying resurrection

and the afterlife (*al-ma‘a¯d*). In the *Decisive Treatise* he outlines

his understanding of Scripture to contain three sorts of texts:

those which must be read literally, those which the demonstrative

class may interpret allegorically, and those over which there

is disagreement. Scholars who err in regard to this third sort of text

should be excused because of the acknowledged difficulty and disagreement.

The issue here is of the third sort. If an expert scholar

should hold for an allegorical interpretation of Scripture on resurrection

and the afterlife with respect to its character (*f¯ıs.*

*ifati al-ma‘a¯d*),

not with respect to its existence (*fı¯ wuju¯ dihi*), he should be excused

“provided that the interpretation given does not lead to denial of

its existence.”20 As we shall see, in his mature philosophical work

Averroes allows no provision for continued existence after death for

individual human beings, though he does hold that human life continues

for other members of the species insofar as the species itself

exists eternally. Hence, we see here again there is no question of two

incompatible truths but rather one truth which may be differently

conceived by people of the different classes of intellectual ability

and assent. Those of the dialectical and rhetorical classes may give

assent to the proposition of future life in accord with their ability

to conceive that life as one of personal immortality and continued

existence for individuals *post mortem*. The philosopher, however,

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gives assent to the proposition of future life, but does so without

understanding it to refer to personal immortality, simply because

the demonstrative methods of philosophical psychology yield only

the notion of a future life for the human species, not the persistence

of particular individuals.21

His argumentation for the existence of God in his *Explanation of*

*the Sorts of Proofs in the Doctrines of Religion* is founded on statements

from the Qur’ ¯an but follows the same model.22 In this work of

dialectical theology Averroes applies his own teachings on the different

classes of human beings to his analysis of methods of Scripture.

Complex syllogistic explanation is not the appropriate method of

persuasion for the common folk and so is not found in the Qur’ ¯an.

Rather, the Qur’ ¯an’s arguments for God are rhetorical and also dialectical

insofar as they are based on commonly held presuppositions of

a religious sort. The argument from providence (*‘ina¯ya*) for humans

holds that the beings of the world exist for sake of human welfare

and that this must be so only by a willing agent. The Qur’ ¯an provides

the premise and affirms the conclusion that the existing God is this

agent. The argument from creation (*khalq*) has the premises that it

is self-evident that animate things differ from inanimate and that

the existence of the animate requires something to provide a determination

(*qat.*

*an*) for life, namely God, the creator. The providential

movement of the heavens for the benefit of our world equally gives

indication of the creator. Thus, since everything created has to have

a creator, observation of the universe and our world together with

these premises yields the conclusion that God exists. For Averroes

these arguments are suitable religious arguments, and they also happen

to coincide with his philosophical argumentation which holds

for a form of divine providence as well as for a form of divine creation.

This understanding and also his rationalist approach to the

issues of religion can be considered to coincide harmoniously with

the rationalist elements of the theology of Ibn Tu¯mart, something

which may have emboldened Averroes to set forth his views publicly

in the four works discussed.23

aristotelian philosophical thought

Of Aristotle Averroes wrote, “I believe that this man was a model

in nature and the exemplar which nature found for showing final

human perfection.”24 He sought so much to follow the lead of

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Aristotle (*Prior Analytics*, I.32) in attempting to convert arguments

to syllogistic figures that he asserts in his *Middle Commentary on*

*the “Prior Analytics”* that all speech and discourse should be reduced

to syllogisms for critical analysis since “the nature of the reality on

which demonstration rests” is truth and its self-consistency.25 While

the effort to return to genuine Aristotelian principles is increasingly

evident in his later works on physics and metaphysics, Averroes

struggled over the years to provide coherent interpretations of texts

and issues in the works of Aristotle, employing translated works

of the Greek commentary tradition by Alexander, Themistius, and

others as aids to understanding much as do philosophers studying

Aristotle today. His best-known struggle was with Aristotle’s teachings

on the intellect.

The Greek and Arabic philosophical traditions clearly saw that

Aristotle in *De Anima*, III.5 posited a transcendent active intellect

as a cause in the transformation of intelligibles in potency garnered

via sensation into intelligibles in act known in human understanding.

Yet they were also acutely aware that Aristotle had nowhere

fulfilled his promise at III.7, 431b17–19, to return to consideration

of the receptive powers of intellect to determine whether thinking of

separate immaterial objects (intelligibles in act) is possible for human

beings when they themselves are confined to the material conditions

of body. While a complex and important issue for all thinkers of

these traditions, for Averroes the issue of the nature, function, and

metaphysical status of the receptive human power called material

intellect (following Alexander of Aphrodisias) was one to which he

returned repeatedly for refinement and development in at least five

distinct works in addition to the three philosophical commentaries

where his fullest accounts are to be found.26

In his *Short Commentary on the “De Anima”* (ca. 1158–60),

Averroes was under the influence of Ibn B¯ajja, who held that the

name, material intellect, denoted an intellectual receptive potency

with human imagination as its subject. After the external and internal

sense powers apprehend the intentions (*ma‘a¯nin*) or intentional

forms of things, these particulars are received into the imagination,

a power of soul which has no need of a bodily instrument for its

activity.27 Causally established in the things of the world by way of

these intentions, these forms come to be intelligible in act through

the immaterial power of the agent intellect which exists separately

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from the soul. On this understanding, receptive material intellect is

understood as “the disposition which is in the forms of the imagination

for receiving intelligibles,”28 brought to exist there thanks to

the agent intellect which thereby brings the individual to intellectual

understanding of intelligibles predicable as universal concepts.

Averroes was initially so pleasedwith this account he called it “true”

and “demonstrative.” This notion of the imagination as the subject

for the material intellect accounts for the personal intellectual

activities of each individual person. As an immaterial disposition

attached to imagination, the material intellect seemed to transcend

body and the particularity characteristicof bodily powers sufficiently

to account for the understanding of intelligibles in act.

With the appearance of the *Middle Commentary* (ca. 1174),

Averroes had substantially rethought his views on the nature of

imagination as a power transcending the body. Imagination is now

conceived as a power too mixed with the body to permit it to be

subject for a disposition which must be so unmixed as to be open

to the reception of any and all intelligibles without distortion or

interference. As completely unmixed, the material intellect cannot

properly be considered to have a subject which is a body or a power

in a body. Apparently using the celestial bodies, souls, and intellects

as his model, Averroes now conceives the material intellect as a disposition

with the soul as subject, but with the special understanding

that it is in its subject without being in a composed union with it,

not involving the sort of composition found in the being of material

substances or accidents. Instead the material intellect is made by

the agent intellect to exist in association with each individual after

the manner of the celestial soul, which has an association with a

celestial body but exists separately. In this sense, then,

the material intellect is something composed of the disposition found

in us and of an intellect conjoined to this disposition. As conjoined to the

disposition, it is a disposed intellect, not an intellect in act; though, as not

conjoined to this disposition, it is an intellect in act; while, in itself, this

intellect is the Agent Intellect, the existence of which will be shown later.

As conjoined to this disposition, it is necessarily an intellect in potentiality

which cannot think itself but which can think other than itself (that is,

material things), while, as not conjoined to the disposition, it is necessarily

an intellect in act which thinks itself and not that which is here (that is, it

does not think material things).29

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Thus, in the *Middle Commentary* the material intellect is a power

made to exist in immaterial association with individual human

beings by the separate agent intellect. This allows for sensed intentions

intelligible in potency to be transformed by the intellectual

power of the agent intellect and deposited in individual and immaterial

receptive intellects belonging to distinct human beings.

The final position of Averroes on intellect is found in his *Long*

*Commentary* (ca. 1190), where he rejects the notion of a plurality

of individual material intellects, argues for a single eternal material

intellect for all humankind, expounds a new teaching on the cogitative

power, excludes human immortality, explains how the agent

intellect is “our final form” and formal cause, and establishes principles

essential for his account of the hierarchical relationship of

intellects leading up to the First Cause or God. While in the earlier

commentaries Averroes was concerned over the requirement that

the material intellect be unmixed, the driving force behind his new

views is found in two key principles generated out of his concern

for the metaphysics and epistemology of the intelligibles received in

the material intellect. The first concerns the material intellect itself.

Insofar as the material intellect is “that which is in potency all the

intentions of universal material forms and is not any of the beings

in act before it understands any of them,”30 it is not possible for

the material intellect itself to be a particular or definite individual

entity (*aliquid hoc* or *al-musha¯ r ila¯ -hi*), since the received intelligible

would be contracted to the particular nature of its subject, the material

intellect. The material intellect then must be an entity unique

in its species. It must be an existing immaterial intellect, yet it must

also be receptive in nature. Averroes marks the unusual nature of the

material intellect by calling it “a fourth kind of being” other than

matter, form, or a composite of these.31 The second concerns the

intelligibles themselves. The problem with the accounts of the earlier

commentaries was that their plurality of immaterial receptive

intellects meant a plurality of intelligibles in act without the same

intelligible being understood by each human being. If two humans

are thinking of the same intelligible, for example, a teacher and a student,

then they cannot be thinking about two different intelligibles.

Indeed, a third intelligible, over and above those in their individual

intellects, would be required to explain why they are in fact thinking

about the same intelligible. Consequently, it is necessary that the

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intelligible in act exist separately from particular or definite individual

entities in the single transcendent material intellect shared by

all human beings.32

This new teaching on the material intellect necessitated not only

a more complex account of the relations of the agent and material

intellects but also a rethinking of the nature of individual human

knowers for Averroes. The result was the development of a more

robust account of the internal sense powers and a detailed exposition

of the role of the cogitative power (*fikr / cogitatio*) in the generation

of intelligibles in the material intellect as well as in the knowing of

intelligibles on the part of individual human beings. In the process

of coming to have knowledge, the perishable bodily powers of common

sense, imagination, cogitation, and memory work together to

spiritualize or denude the intentions apprehended via sense of accidents

and attributes extrinsic to the nature of the thing. Though

none of these are properly called intellect, cogitation can be said to

share in the powers of intellect insofar as it has the task of discerning

and separating off the extraneous before depositing the still particular

denuded form in memory. This brings about the state called the

intellect in a positive disposition (*al-‘aql bi-al-malaka* / *intellectus*

*in habitu*). This disposition allows us to renew our connection with

the material intellect and thus to think again about something we

have thought about already earlier. The intelligibles in act or theoretical

intelligibles thus attained may be said to have two subjects:

the subject of truth, consisting of the cogitative and other internal

powers of the individual soul, is cause of the intention presented to

the material intellect; the subject for the existence of the intelligible

in act is the material intellect where its existence is realized.

Even if the metaphysical natures of the agent and material intellects

must be understood as distinct in existence from perishable

individuals, the powers of these intellects must be understood as

present in human souls and as essentially connected with human

rationality. Our individual voluntary effort at coming to have knowledge

remains grounded in a particular intention, but is also what generates

in the individual the form presented to the separate intellects

for abstraction and intellectual apprehension. This takes place when

the “light” of the agent intellect shines on the presented form and

the material intellect so as to allow for the abstraction of the intelligible

from what has been presented to it and for the impressing of

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the generated intelligible on the receptive material intellect. Like the

potentially transparent medium for sight made actually transparent

by light in Aristotle’s doctrine of light and vision, the material intellect

is actualized as receptive intellect by the “light” of the agent

intellect. Averroes describes this as a process in which intentions

intelligible in potency are made intelligible in act, that is, they are

“transferred” in “being from one order into another.”33 In this natural

process of conjoining (*ittis.a¯ l*), the agent intellect and material

intellect are united with the knower such that the agent intellect is

“our final form,” that is, our formal cause and perfection, and the

material intellect is our intellect. In this process the agent intellect

is “form for us,” both because we are the ones who individually

initiate the process of knowing,34 and also because in knowing, the

agent intellect is intrinsic to us, not something external emanating

intelligibles out of itself. In the formation of knowledge from experience,

the agent intellect does not give intelligibles from its own

nature to some distinct entity, but only functions as an abstractive

and imprinting power, actualized as such only in the presence of

denuded intelligibles provided by individual human beings. Since

humans are deliberate initiators of the process of knowing, the agent

intellect is their formal cause and the material intellect is the receptive

power as shared human intellect actualized in abstraction.35 Yet

the individual human knower, who is bodily and identified with the

perishable cogitative power, perishes at death, while the immaterial

separate intellects continue in their existence eternally functioning

as powers of knowing for other transitory members of the equally

eternal human species.

Averroes understood the new doctrine of the material intellect

in the *Long Commentary on the “De Anima”* to have important

ramifications for his metaphysical teachings in his *Long Commentary*

*on the “Metaphysics”*; the two works refer to each other. In

contrast to Avicenna, who held that metaphysical argument for the

establishment of the existence of the Necessary Being begins with

consideration of primary concepts, Averroes held that the only suitable

philosophical way to the existence of God is throughAristotle’s

arguments of the physics for an eternal cause of the motions of the

heavens. Since physics concerns bodies and powers in bodies, this

science which proves the existence of an eternal immaterial cause

for the motion of the universe could not include in its subject matter

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the nature of this immaterial entity. For Averroes, the role of philosophical

psychology’s epistemological arguments was to show the

identity of intellect and immateriality in the natures of the agent

and material intellects. Thus he could conclude that the immaterial

entity reached by physics is in fact intellectual in nature. And with

its establishment of the material intellect as an incorporeal receptive

potency for intelligibles, philosophical psychology also showed

that immaterial separate intellect could possess potency in some

form.

This was also used by Averroes in his metaphysics to hold for

a hierarchy of specifically distinct intellectual substances ranked

according to potency in relation to God, the First Cause and First

Form, whom he characterized as “pure actuality” (*fi‘lunmah.*

*d.*

*un*).36

While Averroes made liberal use of the language of creation in characterizing

God, his metaphysical teaching expounded an Aristotelian

account of an eternal universe drawn into existence by the final

causality of the pure actuality of the First Cause, which is being in

its highest form. All other entities (including the hierarchy of immaterial

intellects moving the heavens) contain some note of potency

at least insofar as their being and knowing necessarily contain reference

to something extrinsic, namely, the pure actuality of being

of the First Cause. The First Cause alone contains no reference to

anything outside itself. What is more, as pure immaterial actuality

of intellect, the First Cause is the highest actuality of thought with

itself as its sole object, as Aristotle had held. As such, the knowledge

of the First Cause is a noetic and metaphysical identity with

its being. As noted earlier in considering his religious dialectic, for

Averroes divine knowledge is neither universal nor particular and

as such is not to be identified with any of the modes of knowledge

known to human beings. Unlike human knowledge, for Averroes

divine knowledge is creative of things, not posterior to them. In

the context of Averroes’ philosophical thought this can be understood

to mean that the actuality and activity of the First Cause as

the self-knowing pure actuality of being is responsible for its being

the primary referent for all other beings, and thereby the cause of the

existence of all beings as the ultimate final cause against which others

are measured and toward which all beings are drawn. Hence, in

knowing itself, it is knowing the cause of all other beings, and it is

in the same activity causing all other beings.

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Although perhaps somewhat similar in language of dependence,

this doctrine is altogether different from that of Avicenna, who

also held God to be the highest instance of the purity of being

and actuality. While Averroes did set forth a doctrine of emanation

of a hierarchy of intellects in his early *Short Commentary on the*

*“Metaphysics,”*37 he rejected that in his mature thought in favor of

the view recounted above and also rejected the tripartite Avicennian

distinction of being into necessary in itself, possible in itself, and possible

in itself but necessitated by another. Averroes objected to this

view because it allowed only the First Cause to be considered necessary

in its own right. Following Aristotle, he understood the heavens

and their movers not to be possible in themselves but rather necessary

beings in their own right insofar as they are not subject to corruption.

In his *Long Commentary on the “Metaphysics”* Averroes also

rejects the Avicennian distinction between existence and essence,

insisting that Avicenna was confused by theological considerations

contaminating his philosophical metaphysics in thinking that one

and being are dispositions added to the essence of a thing, rather

than seeing man, one man, and existing man as modes of signifying

one reality.38

The works of Averroes were not widely influential in the history

of Arabic philosophy, though they were appreciated by Moses

Maimonides and some were known by Ibn Khaldu¯ n. No school of

Averroist thought arose in the Arabic tradition to continue his work,

perhaps because of his failure to gain favor for his philosophically

driven analysis of religious issues. But his works lived on in translations

into Hebrew and Latin. In the Jewish tradition his translated

works – the Middle Commentaries generally rather than the

Long – were studied intensely and gave rise to their own supercommentary

tradition (see below, chapter 17). In the Christian West,

Latin translations of many of his *Long Commentaries* were available

to thinkers of the thirteenth century, where they served to

play a fundamentally important role in teaching the Latins how to

read Aristotle with sympathy and insight (see below, chapter 18).

The insights of Averroes and his detailed comments on Aristotle

were initially welcomed in the Latin tradition.39 Yet with deeper

critical study and growing familiarity with and reflection upon the

texts and issues, it soon became apparent that the commentaries

of Averroes contained philosophical arguments and teachings on

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issues such as the eternity of the world and the nature of the

soul which were incompatible with Christian belief in creation *ex*

*nihilo* and the personal immortality of the human soul. Around

these issues the so-called “Latin Averroist” controversy arose in

reaction to works by Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia. In

this context the much-discussed and seldom-understood “Double

Truth” doctrine often wrongly attributed to Averroes himself was

thought by Latin religious authorities to be held by certain philosophers

in the Parisian Arts Faculty. This and the other issues mentioned

reasserted themselves in various contexts up to the time

of the Renaissance, when the works of Averroes enjoyed a second

Latin life with new translations, for the most part from Hebrew

versions, and with the publication of printed editions of works of

Aristotle with the Commentaries of Averroes as well as other works

of Averroes.

Understood in this fashion, Averroes has generally come to be

regarded by some as first and foremost a rationalist philosopher

whose loyalty to Islam must either be based on some formof fideism

or must be disingenuous. Yet this dilemma and its dangerous horns

should be rejected for a more sympathetic understanding of Averroes

as a devotee of the most sophisticated and dominant religion of his

historical culture, Islam. A distinguished scholar and religious *qa¯dı¯*,

Averroes’ devotion to Islam and its religious practices was never significantly

questioned in a way prominent to historical scholarship.

Rather, it is apparent that Averroes held the world and its First Principle,

God, to be through and through rational in nature, such that

human rational endeavors are understood to be the keys to the most

complete knowledge and happiness open to human beings.His philosophical

thought includes important roles for religion in the development

of human powers toward their fulfillment in the highest

intellectual insight into God and his creation, even as it gives critical

assessment to the truth and efficacy of religious arguments and

statements.

notes

1 Druart [141].

2 Averroes, *Taha¯ fut al-taha¯ fut*, ed. M. Bouyges, S.J. (Beirut: 1930), 427–8;

Averroes [140], 257–8.

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3 See G. Endress, “*Averrois Opera*: A Bibliography of Editions and Contributions

to the Text,” in Aertsen and Endress [134], 339–81.

4 See C. Burnett, “The Second Revelation of Arabic Philosophy and

Science: 1492–1562,” in C. Burnett and A. Contadini (eds.), *Islam and*

*the Italian Renaissance* (London: 1999), 185–98.

5 See E. Renan, *Averro`es et l’averro¨ısme*, in *OEuvres compl`etes de Ernest*

*Renan*, ed. H. Psichari, vol. III (Paris: 1852); A. von Ku‥ glegen, *Averroes*

*und die arabische Moderne: Ansa¨ tze zu einer Neubegru¨ ndung des*

*Rationalismus im Islam* (Leiden:1994). Also see von Ku‥ glegen, “A

Call for Rationalism: ‘Arab Averroists’ in the Twentieth Century,” *Alif*

(Cairo) 16 (1996), 97–132.

6 See O. Leaman, *Averroes and his Philosophy* (Oxford: 1988) and O.

Leaman, *A Brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford: 1999).

7 Averroes, *Taha¯ fut*, 427–8; Averroes [140], 257–8. Translation slightly

modified; Arabic added.

8 Averroes, *Sharh. al-burh¯ an li-Arist.*

*u¯* , in A. Badawı¯ (ed.), *Ibn Rushd,*

*Sharh. al-burh¯ an li-Arist.*

*¯ u wa-talkh¯ıs.*

*al-burha¯n* (*Grand Commentaire*

*et Paraphrase des “Secondes Analytiques” d’Aristote*) (Kuwait: 1984),

184; Latin *In Aristotelis Opera Cum Averrois Commentariis* (Venice:

1562; repr. Frankfurt a.M.: 1962), vol. I, pt. 2, bk. 1, Comment 9, 32rA.

At 32vD Averroes quotes Aristotle’s text that true conclusions can be

made from false premises, though those conclusions are *per accidens*.

The next Comment argues that the conditions for demonstration must

be met completely.

9 In this translation I follow A. El Ghannouchi, “Distinction et relation

des discours philosophique et religieux chez Ibn Rushd: *Fasl al*

*maqal* ou la double v’erit ’ e,” in *Averroes (1126–1198) oder der Triumph*

*des Rationalismus: Internationales Symposium anla¨ sslich des 800.*

*Todestages des islamischen Philosophen*, ed. R. G. Khoury (Heidelberg:

2002), 139–45; see 145.

10 See chapter 4 above; and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, *Tah.*

*s.*

*ı¯l al-sa‘a¯da*, in *Rasa¯ ’il al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯*

(Hyderabad: 1926/1345 A. H.), 29–36; “The Attainment of Happiness,”

in *Alfarabi’s Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans.M. Mahdi (Ithaca,

NY: 1969), sect. iii, 34–41. Cf. Walzer [77], ch. 17, 276–85.

11 Averroes [139], 49. Translation slightly modified.

12 For detailed discussion of this rendering of Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*,

I.32, 47a8–9, see Taylor [148].

13 Averroes [139], 51.

14 Averroes, *Taha¯ fut*, 151–2; Averroes [140], 90. Creation *ex nihilo* is

also denied in the *Long Commentary on the* “*Metaphysics*”: Averroes,

*Tafsı¯r ma¯ ba‘d al-t.abı¯‘a*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut: 1949), 1497–1505;

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Engl. trans. at Averroes [137], 108–12; Latin in *In Aristotelis Opera*

*cum Averrois Commentariis*, vol. VIII, 304rD–305vI.

15 Averroes [139], 57.

16 Averroes, *Taha¯ fut*, 582; Averroes [140], 360.

17 Averroes [139], 75.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Averroes [139], 61.

21 Taylor [216].

22 Ibn Rushd (Averroes), *al-Kashf ‘an al-mana¯hij al-adilla fı¯ ‘aqa¯ ’id almilla*

(Beirut: 1998), 118–19; English trans. Averroes [136], 79ff.

23 See M. Geoffroy, “L’Almohadisme th’eologique d’Averro`es (Ibn

Rushd),” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et litte´ raire du moyen aˆ ge* 66

(1999), 9–47.

24 Averroes [135], 433.Mytranslation. For other texts, see S. Harvey, “The

Quiddity of Philosophy according toAverroes and Falaquera:AMuslim

Philosopher and his Jewish Interpreter,” in J. A. Aertsen and A. Speer

(eds.), *Was ist Philosophie imMittelalter?* (Berlin: 1998), 904–13. Also

see Taylor [146].

25 Ibn Rushd (Averroes), *Middle Commentary on Aristotle’s “Prior Analytics”*

(Arabic), ed. M. M. Kassem, with C. E. Butterworth and A. Abd

al-Magid Haridi (Cairo: 1983), 226.

26 These are (1) the *Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction*, trans. K. P.

Bland (New York: 1982); (2) *Epistle #1 On Conjunction* and (3) *Epistle*

*#2 On Conjunction*, ed. and trans. in M. Geoffroy and C. Steel (eds.),

*Averroe`s*, *La be´atitude de l’aˆme: e´ditions, traductions et e´ tudes* (Paris:

2001); (4) *De Separatione Primi Principii*, inC. Steel andG. Guldentops,

“An Unknown Treatise of Averroes against the Avicennians on the

First Cause: Edition and Translation,” *Recherches de th´eologie et*

*philosophiem´edi ´evales* 64 (1997), 86–135; and (5) the *Commentary on*

*the “De Intellectu” of Alexander*, in M. Zonta, “La tradizione guideoaraba

ed ebraica del *De intellectu* di Alessandro di Afrodisa e il testo

originale del *Commento* di Averro` e,” *Annali di Ca’ Foscari* 40.3 (2001),

17–35.

27 *Epitome de Anima* (Arabic text), ed. S. G’omez Nogales (Madrid: 1985),

108. G’omez Nogales has also translated his edition as *La psicolog´ıa*

*de Averroes: comentario al libro sobre el alma de Aristo´ teles* (Madrid:

1987).

28 *Epitome de Anima*, 124.

29 Averroes [138], 111–12.

30 Averroes [135], 387. The account which follows is based on 387–8.

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31 Averroes [135], 409.

32 Averroes [135], 411–12.

33 Averroes [135], 439.

34 “[W]ithout the imaginative power and the cogitative [power] the intellect

which is called material understands nothing” (Averroes [135],

450).

35 “[T]hat in virtue of which something carries out its proper activity is

the form, while we carry out our proper activity in virtue of the agent

intellect, it is necessary that the agent intellect be forminus” (Averroes

[135], 500). Also see 439. On “our final form,” see 444–5, 485–6, 490.

36 In the *Long Commentary on the “Metaphysics”*: Averroes, *Tafsı¯r ma¯*

*ba‘d al-t.ab¯ı‘a*, 1599.7.

37 See Davidson [208], 220ff.

38 Averroes, *Tafsı¯r ma¯ ba‘d al-t.abı¯‘a*, 313ff.; see also 1279ff.

39 See C. Baz’an, “Was There Ever a ‘First Averroism’?” in *Miscellanea*

*Mediaevalia* 27 (Berlin: 2000), 31–53.

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10 Suhraward¯ı and Illuminationism

suhraward￣ı and his career

One is tempted to romanticize Suhraward¯ı.1 Indeed, there is no particular

reason to avoid romanticizing himas a personality. He lived the

life of a wanderingwise man, and his story involved a prince, a magic

gem, the fabulous Saladin, and a tragic early death.We can see himas

his contemporaries saw him – probably as he saw himself – as a figure

out of philosophical folklore, the like of whom had not been seen

since Apollonius of Tyana. However, in my view it is a grave error

to examine his philosophy, Illuminationism, through romantic spectacles,

for Suhraward¯ı, despite his own attempts to mystify his project,

was a hardheaded philosophical critic and creative thinker who

set the agenda for later Islamic philosophy. Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s attempt to

make religion independent of reason and Averroes’ Aristotelianism

left little trace in later Islamic thought, but Suhraward¯ı’s critique of

Avicenna’s ontology and of Aristotelian epistemology and his solutions

to these problems were his successors’ starting points. The

modern description of his philosophy as “theosophy” does not do

justice to the rigor and philosophical influence of his thought.2

Suhraward¯ı was probably born around 1154 in the village of

Suhraward near Zanj ¯an in northwestern Iran.3 We know nothing

of his family or ethnic background. He first appears in Mar¯agha, a

nearby city, where he studied logic and philosophy with Majd al-D¯ın

al-J¯ıl¯ı, a scholar of moderate prominence who also was the teacher

of the famous theologian Fakhr al-D¯ın al-R¯az¯ı. Later he studied with

Fakhr al-D¯ın al-M¯ard¯ın¯ı, either in M¯ard¯ın in southeastern Anatolia

or in Isfahan. M¯ard¯ın¯ı was a prominent teacher of medicine and the

rational sciences and apparently a S.

u¯ fı¯. In Isfahan he studied Ibn

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Sahla¯n al-Sa¯wı¯’s *Bas.a¯ ’ir*, an innovative text on logic, with the otherwise

unknown Zah¯ır al-F ¯aris¯ı (or al-Q¯ar¯ı). He seems to have spent

his twenties wandering in central Anatolia and northern Syria in

search of patronage. His books written in this period are dedicated

to various local dignitaries.

At some point in these wanderings Suhraward¯ı abandoned the

Avicennian Peripatetic philosophy that he had learned from his

teacher and became a Platonist. It was, he tells us, his mystical exercises

and a dream of Aristotle that led to his conversion. He does not

explain in detail the mystical experiences, though they seem to have

been connected with the apprehension of the Platonic Forms.4 As for

the dream, Aristotle appeared to him one night, shining with light.

Suhraward¯ı had been struggling with the problem of knowledge.

Aristotle explained that the key to understanding knowledge was

self-consciousness – the basis of the doctrine of knowledge by presence,

of which I will say more presently. After he had finished his

explanations, Aristotle began praising Plato. Startled by the extravagence

of the praise, Suhraward¯ı asked Aristotle whether any of

the Islamic philosophers had reached that rank. It was only the

ecstatic mystics like Bist. ¯am¯ı and Tustar¯ı who were worthy of the

great philosopher’s notice.5

In 1183 he came to Aleppo, which had just been captured by

Saladin. It is said that he entered the city in clothes so shabby that he

wasmistaken for a donkey driver. He took up residence at a*madrasa*,

where the director quickly realized that he was a man of learning and

tactfully sent his young son with a gift of decent clothes. Suhraward¯ı

brought out a large gem and told the boy to go to the market and have

it priced. The boy came back and reported that the prince-governor,

a teenaged son of Saladin, had bid 30,000 dirhams for it. Suhraward¯ı

then smashed the gem with a rock, telling the boy that he could

have had better clothes had he wished.6 Suhraward¯ı was soon under

the protection of the prince. He finished his most important work,

*The Philosophy of Illumination*, three years later on September 15,

1186, on an evening when the sun, the moon, and the five Ptolemaic

planets were all in conjunction in Libra.7

Suhraward¯ı’s ascendancy over the prince, al-Malik al-Z. ¯ahir,

aroused the jealousy of various local scholars. The magical powers

and mystical attainments that he is said to have flaunted cannot

have helped relations. Complaints reached the ear of Saladin.

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Suhraward¯ı’s philosophy would have sounded like Ism¯a‘¯ılism to

Saladin and his conservative religious advisors, and Aleppo was of

great strategic importance, especially with the looming threat of the

Third Crusade. Accordingly, Saladin ordered Suhraward¯ı’s execution,

and the young prince reluctantly acceded. Suhraward¯ı probably died

in 1191, though the accounts are contradictory.8 The circle of disciples

who had accompanied him scattered, and not even their names

are recorded.

suhraward￣ı’s writings and the transition from

peripatetic to illuminationist philosophy

There is a major difficulty in interpreting Suhraward¯ı’s thought. He

is known as *Shaykh al-Ishra¯q*, which means – we will tentatively

(and tendentiously) say – “the master of illumination” or, less dramatically,

“the founder of the Illuminationist school.” The question

is, what might that mean? In the introduction to *The Philosophy of*

*Illumination* Suhraward¯ı says:

Before I wrote this book and during the times when interruptions prevented

me from working on it, I wrote other books in which I have summarized

for you the principles of the Peripatetics according to their method . . .

I also have composed other works, some in my youth. But the present work

has another method and a shorter path to knowledge than their method. It

is more orderly and precise, less painful to study. I did not first arrive at

it through cogitation, but rather it was acquired through something else.

Subsequently I sought proof for it so that should I cease contemplating the

proof, nothing would make me fall into doubt.9

Combining this statement with what we know about Suhraward¯ı’s

surviving works, we can divide them into four classes:

(1) juvenilia;

(2) mystical works, notably a number of allegories;

(3) works expounding the principles of the Peripatetics according

to their methods;

(4) *The Philosophy of Illumination*.

Probably half or less of the bulk of Suhraward¯ı’s writings has been

published and only *The Philosophy of Illumination* and the allegories

have received serious scholarly attention, so anything we can

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say about his works as a whole is necessarily tentative. So far,

Suhraward¯ı’s statement about his works has been understood in two

quite different ways.

The approach popularized by the late Henry Corbin, the scholar

most responsible for bringing Suhraward¯ı to the attention of world

scholarship, focuses on the mystical and mythical elements of

Suhraward¯ı’s thought. The “Peripatetic” works are simply an exercise

for those unable to pursue serious mystical – or to use the term

popularized by Corbin, “theosophical” – investigations. Therefore,

the works of Suhraward¯ı worthy of serious attention are the mystical

allegories and *The Philosophy of Illumination* less its first book,

which deals with logic and the critique of the Peripatetics. By this

account, Suhraward¯ı was a reviver of the wisdom of the ancient

Persians, as indicated by his use of light and darkness as fundamental

philosophical concepts and by his invocation of various Zoroastrian

sages and gods. Thus, Corbin translated the title of *The Philosophy of*

*Illumination* as “Le livre de th’eosophie orientale” and spent a good

deal of time talking about the importance of “spiritual geography”

in Suhraward¯ı’s thought.10

This was not how Suhraward¯ı was understood by most of his

successors in the Islamic world. For both followers like Qut.b al-

D¯ın al-Sh¯ır ¯az¯ı and critics like Mull¯a S. adr¯ a, he was a philosopher

who had made certain specific contributions in metaphysics, ontology,

and epistemology. Suhraward¯ı had begun with a critique of the

standard philosophy of the day, the Peripatetic system of Avicenna,

and attacked it on several major points. First, while attempting to

clarify the murky Aristotelian conception of being, Avicenna had

made a distinction between essence and existence and then assumed

that a real distinction must correspond to this mental distinction.

Suhraward¯ı attacked this assumption, arguing that conceptions such

as existencewere *i‘tiba¯ rı¯*, products of themind. Suhrawardı¯’s successors

accepted his critique ofAvicenna, but disagreed as to whether his

solution was adequate. Mull¯a S. adr¯ a, for example, held that in fact it

was essence, the differences among things, that was *i‘tiba¯ rı¯*. Second,

Suhraward¯ı criticized Avicenna’s Aristotelian conception of knowledge

by abstraction of forms. Instead, he argued that knowledge was

essentially the unmediated presence of the thing known to the conscious

knower. This theory was the basis of his use of mysticism

as a philosophical tool. This criticism and solution was generally

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accepted by his successors. Finally, Suhraward¯ı argued that philosophical

cosmology required the assumption that existents could differ

in intensity as well as in kind. Again, this theory was immensely

influential among his successors.

Suhraward¯ı made various other criticisms of the prevailing

Avicennian Peripateticism: a reassertion of the doctrine of Platonic

Forms, an attack on the Peripatetic theory of essential definition,

and an attack on the Peripatetic theory of matter, for example.

These were obviously philosophical positions, understood as such by

Suhraward¯ı’s successors. Moreover, *The Philosophy of Illumination*,

by universal agreement the most important of Suhraward¯ı’s works,

was understood by his successors through a series of philosophically

oriented commentaries, notably the commentary of Shahrazu¯ rı¯, its

adaptation by Qut.b al-D¯ın al-Sh¯ır ¯az¯ı, and the annotations by Mull¯a

S.

adr¯a. These commentaries translated its novel philosophical terminology

into the standard philosophical language of Avicenna so

that, for example, “barrier” becomes “body” and “managing light”

becomes “soul.”11 The legitimacy of this procedure was not, so far as

I know, questioned from within the Islamic philosophical tradition,

though it has been by some modern scholars.

Whether or not they were correct to label Suhraward¯ı a

“theosophist,” Corbin and his followers were quite correct in stressing

the importance of the passages in Surhaward¯ı’s writing concerning

his philosophical genealogy. Suhraward¯ı clearly saw himself

as the reviver of the most ancient tradition of philosophy. Modern

scholars for the most part would see the genealogy of Islamic philosophy

as going back to Aristotle as understood by his later commentators

with some Neoplatonic influence through stray texts like

the *Theology of Aristotle*. There was perhaps some slight influence

from other Greek philosophical schools and from other nations in

politics and ethics. Later on, there was influence fromS.

u¯ fism, with

Suhraward¯ı being one of the important instances.

Suhraward¯ı saw things differently. There were three ancient

sources of philosophical thought: the Egyptians, the Indians and

Chinese, and the ancient Persians. Themainstream of Islamic philosophy

derived ultimately from Egypt, from the philosopher-prophet

Hermes Trismegistus, also called Enoch or Idr¯ıs.12 Empedocles had

studied in Syria and Pythagoras in Egypt and Mesopotamia. The two

of them were the founders of the tradition of “divine philosophy” in

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Greek philosophy. Socrates and Plato were under their influence,

and Aristotle was, of course, the student of Plato. The followers of

Aristotle took his philosophy in two directions. The Aristotelians

best known in the Islamic world were those who pursued only the

superficial aspects of his thought. Their champion wasAvicenna, and

Suhraward¯ı himself had belonged to their school. However, there

were also Aristotelians – including Aristotle himself in his later

years – who carried on the divine philosophy of Plato, which is represented

in such works as the *Theology*. In the meantime, there was

also a Pythagorean tradition that survived in Egypt and was associated

with the alchemists of Panopolis. Its Islamic representatives

were the S.

¯ uf¯ı alchemist Dh ¯ u al-N¯ un al-Mis.

r¯ı and his student Sahl

al-Tustar¯ı. Second, there was the tradition of the ancient Persians,

represented by various pre-Islamic Persian sages and by the ecstatic

PersianS.

u¯ fı¯s Abu¯ Yazı¯d al-Bast.a¯mı¯, al-H. alla¯ j, and al-Kharaqa¯nı¯. The

exact position of the Chinese and Indians, the third source of philosophy,

is less clear. Probably, Suhraward¯ı saw them mostly as having

parallel traditions of wisdom whose influence on Islamic philosophy,

such as it might be, was either through the Iranians or through

Pythagoras, who was thought to have journeyed in the East and to

have had followers in India. Suhraward¯ı was thus the first of the

Muslim philosophers to reunite these various traditions, and it is

clear from the language he uses that Plato was the central hero of his

philosophy.13

Though there is much of the mythical in Suhraward¯ı’s account

of the history of philosophy, it deserves some consideration both

on historical and philosophical grounds. First some comments and

clarifications. The Ionian physicists are ignored, although they were

known to Muslimphilosophers through doxographies, Aristotle, and

the Galenic tradition. There are also no Christians or Muslims,

except for theS.

u¯ fı¯s, and these do not include the individuals usually

listed as the founding fathers of Islamic mysticism. The Persians

are not historical Zoroastrian priests but legendary Persian kings

and viziers, understood as sages. The connections to the Orientals –

Persians, Indians, and Chinese – are much vaguer than those to the

Greeks. As for the Greeks, Suhraward¯ı’s “divine philosophers” are

what the doxographers called “the Italian School.” The historical

Socrates and Plato obviously had connections to both the Ionians

and the Italians, but I think that Suhraward¯ı was correct to say that

Plato should be thought of primarily as a successor of Empedocles

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and Pythagoras rather than of Thales and the Ionians. Moreover, the

view that the Egyptian alchemists preserved a pre-Platonic philosophical

tradition that they passed on to the Muslims has recently

found a scholarly defender.14 Both the occult sciences and medicine

transmitted Greek thought to the Muslims in parallel to the translations

of Aristotle and other philosophers.15

Suhraward¯ı’s interest in his philosophical genealogy, its “Oriental”

connections, and many of its details are characteristic of the

whole Pythagorean/Platonic/Neoplatonic tradition. Plato, Porphyry,

Iamblichus, and Renaissance and early modern Neoplatonists like

Bruno were all interested in ancient wisdom, Oriental wisdom, and

particularly Egyptian wisdom. They were all interested in the allegorical

interpretation of classic texts. There was a consistent interest

in occult sciences and their practical application. Members of this

tradition believed that truth is primarily to be found in anintelligible

world, accessible to us only through some sort of intellectual or mystical

intuition and accessible only imperfectly. The product of such

intuition can be conveyed only through language that is symbolic to

one degree or another. The mythical systems of other peoples presumably

represent the intuitions of their sages. Ancient Egypt, with

its rich mythology and evocative hieroglyphs, exercised a unique

fascination.16

the nominalist intuition and the critique

of avicenna

The explanation that a philosopher gives of the universe and our

knowledge of it depends very much on how he is inclined to see the

world when he starts out; one is born a Platonist or Aristotelian, it is

said. For Suhraward¯ı the relevant fact is that the world stands present

to us as distinct manifest concrete things having particular qualities.

It may be that it is only after rigorous training that we learn to see

everything that is before us – he is a mystic, after all – but even our

knowledge of God and the metaphysical foundations of the universe

is not a matter of laborious construction and deduction but of learning

to see what is always before us. We see what is concrete, and it

is the concrete thing that is real, not the metaphysical ingredients

whose existence we might infer. Thus in metaphysics Suhraward¯ı

rejects realism with regard to universals, holding that everything

that exists is a particular; in this he may be compared to nominalists

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like Ockham. And in epistemology he holds that knowledge

consists in immediate awareness; in this he may be compared

to empiricists like Berkeley and Hume. Like the nominalists and

empiricists he is suspicious of metaphysical constructs and thus is

more zealous as a philosophical critic than as a constructor of systems.

Given the way that Suhraward¯ı has usually been portrayed,

these claims need to be defended.17

The place to start is where Suhraward¯ı himself claimed to have

started – with the doctrine that later came to be known as “knowledge

by presence.” The dominant epistemological theory among

Muslim philosophers of Suhraward¯ı’s time was that of Avicenna,

which in turn derived from the theory of cognition in Aristotle’s *De*

*Anima*. In this Peripatetic epistemology, as Suhraward¯ı would have

called it, our senses are affected by external stimuli. The resulting

forms are imprinted somehow in the sense organs and then are combined

in the brain and manipulated in various ways to produce the

objects of sensation and imagination. Objects of pure thought – the

concept of triangle, for example – cannot simply be imprinted in

the brain since any imprinted triangle must necessarily be the

image of some particular triangle with particular angles and sides

of particular length. Such abstract ideas must therefore be in the

immaterial mind, which has the capacity to become the idea of

triangle. The idea of triangle comes into being in the immaterial

intellect through the contemplation of the particular triangles presented

to it by the senses and the related material faculties of the

brain. The intellect is thus able to recognize the pure essences of

things in the material images presented to it by the senses and the

brain. These then become the raw materials of the sciences and real

knowledge.18

There are difficulties, however, as anyone who has wrestled with

Aristotle’s accounts of cognition can testify. The theory explains

how we know universals once we know them but not how we come

to know universals nor how we know particulars beyond the level of

sensation. The obvious problem is that the theory seems to require

that we can recognize the essences of natural kinds by inspection and

know immediately what those essences consist in. This is plausible

if we are talking about triangles, but Aristotle developed the theory

for natural science and biology. We should thus know that human

beings are rational animals by meeting various human beings and

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know by inspection that bats and horses belong to the same class,

mammals, but that bats and birds are in quite different classes. This

implausibility has always dogged the Peripatetic scientific project,

despite Aristotle’s attempt to address the problem in *Posterior*

*Analytics*, II.19. From an Islamic point of view the greater difficulty

is that we cannot have intellectual knowledge of particulars. We

know geometry as immaterialminds, but we know the things around

us as material beings, in the same way that animals do. We might

live with the implausibility of knowing the diagram in a geometry

book in a completely different way than we know the theorem illustrated,

but the theory also implies that God cannot know particulars.

Averroes responded that God knew things through their causes, but

this does not seem too convincing.19

Suhraward¯ı started over with the phenomenon of vision, the

noblest of the senses and the usual, if not always acknowledged,

starting point for theories of knowledge. There had been for centuries

two contradictory theories of vision – extramission and intromission.

In the one a cone went out from the eye and contacted the

objects of vision; in the other something came in from the things

seen and affected the eye. The former lent itself to mathematical

optics but was physically implausible. The latter was more plausible

physically, even if no one had quite worked out the details, but it

had mathematical problems. Both theories had difficulties explaining

how light made it possible to see things. (The theory of Ibn al-

Haytham, or Alhazen, which is more or less correct, was not yet

widely known.) Suhraward¯ı pointed out that both theories missed a

fundamental point, that we see *things*, not the images of things. We

see a large mountain that is far away, not a small image in the eye.

We see whiteness whether or not it is brightly illumined. Actually,

vision is simple, Suhraward¯ı tells us. It consists of a sound eye being

in the unveiled presence of something illumined. Light is simply that

which makes something manifest. Most important, vision requires a

self-aware being. The other senses are analogous. Obviously, a completely

worked out Illuminationist theory of vision would require

us to take account of the mechanics of perspective and the eye, but

Suhraward¯ı has made an important point, that the critical element in

sensation is that there is awareness by a conscious being of the thing

that is the object of sensation. That awareness is what distinguishes

a human being seeing from a movie camera.20

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He then extends this theory to knowledge in general. In the

famous dream, Aristotle had told him that the key to understanding

knowledge was self-knowledge. Knowledge, like vision, consists

in the unveiled presence of the object of knowledge before the selfaware

knower. Later Illuminationists refer to this as the unity of the

knower, knowledge, and object of knowledge, but this formulation

misses the point that I think is important – that knowledge is of

particular things that can be apprehended directly. Being a mystic,

Suhraward¯ı did not think that the objects of the senses were the only

things that could be apprehended. We can, with suitable training,

apprehend the immaterial beings – the angels and Platonic Forms.

Nevertheless, these too are particulars (on Forms as particulars, see

further below). The whole theory is nominalism of a thoroughly radical

sort.21

This nominalism is the basis for his attack on the Peripatetic theory

of essential definition. Aristotle, followed by his Islamic disciples,

had held that the essences of things are made known by essential

definitions, *h.*

*udu¯ d* in Arabic. Such definitions consist of the genus

plus the differentia – “man is a rational animal,” for example. Other

kinds of definitions might succeed in identifying a natural kind –

“man is a laughing biped” – but they do not make the essence known.

If we know the differentia, we effectively already know the thing, but

in practice we can never know whether we have exhausted the differentia

of a particular kind. Moreover, many Peripatetic definitions

turn out to be more obscure than what they define. “Black gathers

vision,” but, of course, anyone who can see knows what black is. If

he doesn’t, it can be pointed out to him. Since Aristotle andAvicenna

identify essential definition as the way by which concepts must be

conveyed, Suhraward¯ı concludes that the Peripatetics have made it

impossible to know anything.22

the metaphysics of illuminationist

neoplatonism

The ontological counterpart of Suhraward¯ı’s critique of Peripatetic

epistemology is the doctrine of *i‘tiba¯ ra¯ t ‘aqliyya* or beings of

reason.23 *I‘tiba¯ r* means taking something into account or considering

something. Beings of reason for Suhraward¯ı are those concepts

that result from themind’s contemplation of the thing, not from the

apprehension of the concrete qualities of the thing. If we say that a

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particular horse has four legs or is brown, these are concrete qualities,

properties that we meet in the actual horse in the real world.

However, if we say that the horse is existent, one, or contingent,

these are properties that have to do with how we think about the

real horse. When properties are made into nouns, brownness and

four-leggedness refer to something concrete while existence, unity,

and contingency do not – or, if they do, they all refer to the same

thing, the horse itself.24

The target of this analysis is, as usual, the Peripatetics. Avicenna

had made a distinction between the essence – or, more properly,

quiddity – of a thing and its existence. He pointed out that you could

ask two quite different questions about a thing: “Is it?” and “What

is it?” The first addressed its existence and the second its quiddity.25

The Aristotelian roots of this distinction are obvious, and it is clearly

a useful clarification of Aristotle, employing the distinction between

the Arabic participle and infinitive. The distinction is legitimate.

The difficulty is that Avicenna seems to assume that a real distinction

corresponds to the mental distinction, that if we can distinguish

the existence from the quiddity of a thing, the thing must contain

both existence and quiddity. The move is the more natural since it

reflects an Aristotelian tendency to explain things as combinations

of substrates and forms. There are difficulties. Bemused European

philosophers pointed out that the distinction implied that existence

was an accident.26 The problem, as Suhraward¯ı relentlessly points

out, is that it leads to insuperable problems of regression. One can

ask the same questions about the quiddity and the existence. Is there

a quiddity and existence of the existence and of the quiddity? What

about the existence of the existence of the existence? Similar arguments

can be made against the other beings of reason: unity, contingency,

necessity, and the like.

Suhraward¯ı gives a parallel critique of the Peripatetic doctrine of

hylomorphism, the theory that material bodies are compounds of

matter and form, with form being a composite of forms of different

kinds: species, accidents, elements, and qualities of various sorts.

Suhraward¯ı finds this all quite implausible and argues instead for

a simpler explanation, that bodies are just self-subsistent magnitude

and qualities. It is a theory that has its origins in Plato’s

*Timaeus* and reappears occasionally thereafter in the history of philosophy,

notably in Descartes. It is not particularly central to the

Illuminationist project, for the theory is abandoned by Suhraward¯ı’s

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commentator Qut.b al-D¯ın Sh¯ır ¯az¯ı, but it is characteristic of Suhraward

¯ı’s ontologically parsimonious critique of the Peripatetics.27

In modern times, Suhraward¯ı is best known for the metaphysics

of light that appears in the second book of *The Philosophy of Illumination*.

The relation of this system to the critique of the Peripatetics

in the first half of that book is reasonably clear: the Peripatetic

doctrines that he refutes concern the fundamental epistemological

and metaphysical issues where his new system differs from that of

Avicenna.28 It is less clear how the metaphysics of *The Philosophy*

*of Illumination* relates to his so-called Peripatetic works, some of

which were written at roughly the same time as this work. The usual

account is that these other works are intended for those incapable

of understanding the true Illuminationist philosophy and are therefore

of at best limited significance for understanding Suhraward¯ı’s

thought. I aminclined to doubt it, since his later followers seem to

have made no such distinction, but the solution waits on serious

study of Suhraward¯ı’s other philosophical works.

Whatever may be the relation of the second part of *The Philosophy*

*of Illumination* to his other work, its philosophical doctrine

is reasonably clear with careful reading and the advice of the early

commentators.29 Suhraward¯ı begins by identifying his fundamental

concepts: light and darkness, independent and dependent. Light, he

explains, is the most self-evident of entities, “that which is manifest

in itself and manifests others,” says one of the commentators, citing

a well-known definition of light.30 The independent entity is that

whose existence or perfections do not rest upon another. Darkness

and the dependent are the opposite. Moreover, light and darkness can

be either self-subsistent or in another. This corresponds to a distinction

that he made earlier between substance, that whose existence

is not diffused throughout another, and states, which exist diffused

throughout another. These distinctions yield four classes of entities:

(1) Self-subsistent or immaterial lights, which the commentators

identify with intellects.

(2) Barriers or substantial darknesses, which are bodies.

(3) Accidental lights, which are physical light and various other

self-manifesting accidents.

(4)Dark accidents, those properties that are not manifest in

themselves.

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Everything that exists falls into one of these four classes. Light is

active; darkness, whether substantial or accidental, is passive.

(1) Immaterial lights are intellects orminds. The key concept here

is “self-evident” or “manifest.” Immaterial lights are manifest both

to other things, like all light, and to themselves, which is to say

that they are self-aware and aware of other things. Therefore, anything

that is alive must be an immaterial light. They are, we must be

clear, lights, not light. Suhraward¯ı is not thinking of a substratum of

luminous matter or chunks of light that are emitted from something

luminous, cross the intervening space, and fall on something else. He

is thinking of distinct luminous individual incorporeal things whose

essence is tobemanifest. They are more likeLeibnizian monads than

like the undifferentiated primal reality of existence that we find in

some later philosophers like Mull¯a S. adr¯a and Sabziw¯ar¯ı. They are

individualized by differences in intensity and by luminous and dark

accidents; Suhraward¯ı has earlier argued that things can differ by the

intensity of their being. If they are above a certain level of intensity,

their ability to manifest other things includes the ability to bring

other things into being and to sustain their existence. His concept

of immaterial light can be identified with the ordinary Peripatetic

concept of intellect but with two new features: first, if immaterial

lights are sufficiently intense, they can create, and, second, they are

manifest to other immaterial lights, so that we can, in principle, see

God and the celestial intellects/lights. (2) Dark barriers or bodies are

more or less the opposite. They are neither manifest in themselves,

nor do they manifest another. Therefore, they can be seen only with

the aid of accidental light and be known only by incorporeal lights,

and they are alive only insofar as they are associated with an incorporeal

light. They are passive, not active, so that both their activities

and they themselves are the effects of lights. (3) Accidental lights are

physical lights and the luminous accidents that occur in both barriers

and in immaterial lights. Like immaterial lights, accidental lights are

manifest and manifest other things, but since they subsist in something

else, they are not self-aware or alive. (4) Dark accidents are the

qualities of physical things that are not manifest in themselves, as

well as certain states in immaterial lights.

All these entities are connected through illumination and their

presence to each other. The immaterial lights must be causally primary,

since an accident in itself cannot be the cause of a substance

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nor can a passive darkness be the cause of light with its activity. The

more intense immaterial lights can be the efficient and sustaining

causes of other immaterial lights less intense than themselves. They

can also be the cause of both luminous and dark accidents in lower

lights due to the lower light’s contemplation respectively of the luminosity

of the higher light and its own relation of dependence. Thus,

immaterial lights can differ in intensity and in luminous and dark

accidents. Finally, the immaterial lights can be the cause of barriers,

bodies, through their aspect of dependence on another. The immaterial

lights are also the ultimate cause of the luminous accidents

in physical bodies – which is to say, physical light – as well as their

dark accidents. If we work our way up this causal chain of entities

we reach first immaterial lights and finally an immaterial light that

is not caused by another immaterial light, the Light of Lights or God.

From this set of entities and relationships, Suhraward¯ı derives his

cosmology. First – in an ontological, not a temporal sense – there is

the Light of Lights. Its illumination results in another immaterial

light, and this second light’s illumination results in a third immaterial

light. Suhraward¯ı calls this the vertical order of lights. At some

point, there is a double effect, both an immaterial light resulting

from the luminosity of the higher light and a material sphere resulting

from its dependence on and separation from the Light of Lights.

This is the outer sphere of the universe. At each step down from here,

there is another immaterial light and another sphere. At some point,

there also begin to be material lights associated with the spheres.

Moreover, immaterial lights begin to multiply on the lower levels

since there can also be lights reflecting the various luminous and

dark accidents of the higher lights. These can be of equal intensity

but differ by accidents and are called the horizontal order of lights

though, of course, they can be of many different levels. They are,

Suhraward¯ı tells us, the Platonic Forms, the “archetypes of the talismans.”

Since the lights become weaker at each successively lower

stage, there comes a point when the immaterial light cannot create

another sphere, and we have reached the earth. The lowest immaterial

lights are the souls of living beings in this world.

These classes of lights interact with the material world in various

ways. The lights that are the souls of the spheres drive the planets.

The paths of the planets and the pattern of the stars are determined by

the incomprehensible complexity of the horizontal order of immaterial

lights. The lights that are the Platonic Forms care for the various

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kinds of things in the world, giving them their characteristic manifolds

of qualities, acting as the efficient causes of the formal causes of

material things. The souls or managing lights rule individual living

things.

There is a puzzle connectedwith the human soul. Souls are immaterial

lights, but unlike the lights that rule the sphere or that are

the Platonic Forms, human and animal souls apparently come into

being. Suhraward¯ı, like the other philosophers of the Platonic tradition,

believed that the soul is essentially independent of the body and

thus survives its death. Like most important Islamic philosophers,

Suhraward¯ı seems to have believed that the world had no beginning

in time, and it is difficult to imagine how he would have explained

the creation of the world in time in terms of his cosmological system.

The questions are: when do souls come into being, how many

of them are there, what happens to them after death, and what is

their relation to the souls of animals? Plato believed in both the fall

of the soul and reincarnation. The fall of the soul is the doctrine that

the soul originally existed in a higher world then ventured down into

this world and became entangled in matter. A version of Plotinus’

account was transmitted in the *Theology of Aristotle*, a work that

Suhraward¯ı was surely familiarwith.31 The fall of the soul is a theme

of most of Suhraward¯ı’s allegories, but it is not clear whether it is

a metaphor or his actual doctrine. In *The Philosophy of Illumination*

he gives an elaborate account of reincarnation attributed not

to Plato but to the Buddha and the Oriental sages. In this account,

which Suhraward¯ı cites but does not explicitly endorse, the human

soul is the “gate of gates” for souls, which is to say that at conception

a human soul is emanated and then at death this soul passes

into animals suited to its particular moral character. The soul is

repeatedly reborn in animals of various kinds until all of its vicious

characteristics have been purged, whereupon it is free to rise to the

world of light. His commentator Qut.b al-D¯ın believed that this was

Suhraward¯ı’s own view, which seems quite likely since there is no

evidence of a source for this supposedly quoted text. It is not unreasonable

that he should have believed in reincarnation, for it was a

characteristic doctrine of Platonists of all periods, but it was a very

unusual position for a Muslim.32

A related issue is the doctrine of *‘a¯ lam al-mitha¯ l*, the world of

immaterial images. This metaphysical doctrine, which was to be of

great importance in the later tradition, was a way to account for a

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variety of phenomena inwhich forms could not be explained as being

embedded in matter. These included the images in mirrors and the

imagination, dreams, miracles of certain sorts, and various eschatological

events and entities. In such cases there is a material locus

(*mah.*

*all*), but the images are manifested through it, not embedded

in it. It was a concept of considerable power, for it allowed philosophers

to accept the literal reality of religious phenomena that were

not physically plausible, such as the events of theDay of Judgment. It

was far preferable to the radical allegorizing that philosophers such as

Averroes had used to explain such things. The concept was still rudimentary

and undeveloped in Suhraward¯ı, but it developed rapidly in

the hands of his successors, notably Qut.b al-D¯ın Sh¯ıraz¯ı, who wrote

an essay on it.33

There is a point that needs to be emphasized about this cosmological

system. It is made up solely of concrete, apprehendable individuals

and their concrete, apprehendable accidents. It is true that some

of these entities can only be apprehended at the end of an arduous

course of mystical training, but in principle the immaterial lights

are as concrete and manifest as the sun. The metaphysical apparatus

needed to sustain this system is minimal. There is no hierarchy of

Peripatetic forms in concrete individuals – elements, species, genera,

essential accidents, etc. – only the substances and their accidents.

The regularity of nature is maintained by the direct action of the

immaterial lights. Rabbits, liverworts, and granite boulders remain

what they are and breed true because there are immaterial lights,

angelic minds, Platonic Forms, or whatever they should be called,

that act through their radiated light to make them do so. It is a system

as resolutely parsimonious as anything Ockham or Hume could

devise.

the politics of illuminationism

Suhraward¯ı saw himself as the inheritor of a Pythagorean and

Platonic tradition, a tradition many of whose figures ran afoul of

political authority. Pythagoras is said to have died of grief or starved

after the philosophical republic he had established in southern Italy

was overthrown by a democratic revolution. Empedocles was exiled.

Socrates was executed, nominally for corrupting the religion of the

young but probably for his connections with former students like

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Alcibiades and Critias who betrayed the Athenian democracy. Plato

attempted to educate the young tyrant of Syracuse but had to make

his escape when the venture failed. According to legend, he escaped

slavery only because one of his old students recognized him and

bought himat auction. There is considerable confusion in the sources

about Suhraward¯ı’s death and its causes, but the general picture

seems plain enough. His offense seems to have been his influence

over al-Malik al-Z. ¯ahir, the son of Saladin who was prince-governor

of Aleppo. Jealous clerics accused him of various heresies, including

a claimto prophethood, and Saladin, the zealous defender of Muslim

orthodoxy, ordered him executed.

There is a philosophical background to this, however. In the introduction

to *The Philosophy of Illumination*, Suhraward¯ı had distinguished

between the discursive and intuitive philosophers,whomwe

may identify with the Peripatetics and the Illuminationists. Philosophers

could be proficient, deficient, or intermediate in each kind of

philosophy, but divine providence insured that at the least the world

was never without a philosopher proficient in intuitive philosophy.

This proficient intuitive philosopher was the true king, the man that

theS.

u¯ fı¯s called the Pole, and he might rule either openly or secretly.

If there was in any age a philosopher proficient in both discursive and

intuitive philosophy and if political power was actually in his hand,

“he will be the ruler by right and the vicegerent of God . . . When the

government is in his hands, the age will be luminous.”34 This is not

a particularly developed political doctrine, but it is a recognizable

mystical variant of the Platonic doctrine of the philosopher-king.

Saladin would have found it disturbingly similar to the political doctrines

of the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs, philosophically inclined sectarians whom he

had suppressed with considerable difficulty in both Egypt and Syria.

Since the Third Crusade was bearing down on him and Aleppo sat

astride his lines of communication to the east, it is scarcely surprising

that he saw Suhraward¯ı as dangerous and acted decisively to end

his influence over his son.

the illuminationist school

When Suhraward¯ı was killed, his disciples fled, or so we are told by

the biographers. This fact does have philosophical significance since

it determined the reception of Suhraward¯ı’s thought. Suhraward¯ı was

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certainly not forgotten, for he was a colorful figure who died young.

Historians and biographers of the following generation were interested

in him, and there were contemporaries and even teachers who

survived to talk about him. What seems not to have survived was

a living tradition of interpretation of his work. In *The Philosophy*

*of Illumination* he refers to a successor, “he who arises with the

Book,” as holding the keys to the meaning of his Illuminationist

philosophy. Moreover, he insisted that *The Philosophy of Illumination*

could only be understood by someone who had undergone a

course of mystical discipline.35 This seems rather an exaggeration,

since the book is actually quite clearly written. Nevertheless, certain

matters do remain obscure, notably the exact relation between *The*

*Philosophy of Illumination* and his books written in “the Peripatetic

mode.”

The earliest surviving evidence of scholarly interpretation of

Suhraward¯ı’s *Philosophy of Illumination* dates from the mid- to late

seventh/thirteenth century – a generation or two after the death of

the unnamed fugitive disciples. This is Shams al-Dı¯n al-Shahrazu¯ rı¯’s

*Commentary on the “Philosophy of Illumination.”* Shahrazu¯ rı¯ definitely

states in the introduction to the book that it was based on

the study of Suhraward¯ı’s text (and mystical inspiration), so it is

quite clear that he did not have access to an oral tradition of interpretation

of Suhraward¯ı. Qut.b al-D¯ın’s commentary, published in

1295, in turn is based almost exclusively on Shahrazu¯ rı¯’s.36 The one

other direct evidence of early scholarly interest in Suhraward¯ı is what

Ziai and I refer to as the “corrected text” of *The Philosophy of Illumination*,

the text used as the basis of Qut. b al-D¯ın’s commentary.

This edition corrects various lapses in the text used by Shahrazu¯ rı¯,

which was also known to Qut.b al-D¯ın through a manuscript that

had been read to Suhraward¯ı for correction. Though we can hardly

be certain, this edition has an academic feel to it. To this list can be

added Sa‘d al-Dı¯n ibn Kammu¯ na (d. 1284), a philosopher of Jewish

background, who published a commentary on one of Suhraward¯ı’s

“Peripatetic” works around 1270.37 These three commentators are

also the principal early exponents of Suhraward¯ı’s philosophy. Thereafter,

Suhraward¯ı’s works attracted readers, citations, and occasional

commentators, though none of them seem to have become school

texts,with the relatively elementary *Temples of Light* being the work

most commented on.38

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Suhraward¯ı’s later readers almost always treated himas a philosopher.

The early commentators had, in effect, translated the light

metaphysics of *The Philosophy of Illumination* back into standard

philosophical terminology. The light metaphysics was admired,

but it influenced mostly poets and ecstatics, not philosophers. The

problems that interested later Islamic philosophers were the points

on which he had critized Avicenna: existence as a being of reason,

the Platonic Forms, knowledge by presence, and a few other

points. These were decisive issues and shaped the agenda of later

Islamic philosophy. Philosophers debated whether quiddity was primal,

the position of Suhraward¯ı and M¯ır D¯am¯ad, or existence, the

view defended by Mull¯a S. adr¯a and Sabziw¯ar¯ı, among others. Intense,

highly sophisticated debates raged on these issues, and they continue

to this day in the madrasas of Qom.

There was a popular and nationalistic side to Suhraward¯ı’s heritage.

His reference to exoticOriental sages and terms drew the attention

of commentators. More important, they drew the attention of

Zoroastrian scholars in India, who found it convenient to interpret

Suhraward¯ı’s claim that his philosophy corresponded with that of

the sages of ancient Persia as meaning that his philosophy was the

secret wisdom of the Zoroastrian sages. Thus, a popularized form

of his philosophy enjoyed a vogue in India in the shape of a forged

ancient Persian scripture, the *Dasa¯ tı¯r*. Ultimately, Henry Corbin’s

influential interpretation of Suhraward¯ı derives from the Zoroastrian

authors of the *Dasa¯ tı¯r* and related texts.39

Suhraward¯ı was revived once again in twentieth century-Iran

under the nationalist Pahlavi shahs. As in Turkey, the nationalist

rulers of Iran sought to free their native language from the influence

of Arabic. In any case, knowledge of Arabic was declining

precipitously among younger Iranians who preferred to study European

languages. The two trends combined to produce a demand for

Persian prose classics – there was no lack of Persian poetry – and literary

heroes of Persian nationalism. Suhraward¯ı with his exquisite

Persian allegories fitted perfectly. His allegories were widely read

and in the eyes of many Persian scholars and philosophers came to

be considered the centerpiece of his philosophy. This seems wrong on

the face of it, since the content of the allegories is quite elementary

and they do not containhis more advanced doctrines. I am convinced

they were intended for popular readers and for students.40

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Suhraward¯ı represents a decisive moment in Islamic philosophy,

the break with the Peripatetic philosophy of Avicenna. Suhraward¯ı

attacked certain key Peripatetic doctrines, notably the reification of

metaphysical abstractions like existence, defending instead a sort

of rigorous Platonic nominalism. Philosophically, his influence was

decisive, setting the agenda for later Islamic philosophy. What is the

nature of consciousness and how does it shape what we can know?

How do we experience knowing, whatever the mechanics of sensation

and abstraction may be?His questions are those of the Platonists

and the mystics, the nature of the intelligible world and of inwardness.

Others, most especially Mull¯a S. adr¯ a, the greatest of Muslim

scholastics, went on to build great palaces of the mind upon the

foundations he laid. The clerical philosophers of the holy cities of

Mashhad and Qom still wander their corridors, and the questions

that trouble their thoughts are still, in great part, those asked by

Suhraward¯ı.

notes

1 This chapter is largely based on three books that I have written on

Suhraward¯ı and his school: Walbridge [154], [155], and [156]. Representative

books expressing other interpretations of Suhraward¯ı include

Corbin [150], Corbin [7], Nasr [151], and Aminrazavi [149]; and also Ziai

[158].

2 “Theosophy” in this context has nothing to do with the modern religious

sect. The term was applied to Suhraward¯ı’s philosophy by his

most influential Western interpreter, the late Henry Corbin, who also

produced the main modern edition of Suhraward¯ı’s works. Corbin’s

interpretation of Suhraward¯ı really reflects his own philosophical

project, which had roots in modern perennialism, Masonic thought, and

twentieth-century continental philosophy, notably Heidegger and Jung.

Corbin’s view of Suhraward¯ı has been supported by Seyyed Hossein

Nasr, MehdiAminrazavi, and most other recent scholars who have written

about Suhraward¯ı. This “theosophical interpretation” of Suhraward¯ı

is part of a larger account of the history of Islamic philosophy stressing

mystical elements and rooting it in ancient Iranian thought and mythology.

My differences with this interpretation will be made clear below,

but the reader should be aware that I represent a minority opinion.

3 For a list of primary sources on Suhraward¯ı’s life, see Suhraward¯ı [152],

165 n. 1. The most important source is Shahraz ¯ ur¯ı’s *Nuzha al-arw¯ah.*

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a biographical dictionary of ancient and Islamic philosophers, one version

of which is translated in Suhraward¯ı [153], ix–xiii. Most modern

works on Suhraward¯ı contain a brief biography, more or less based on

Shahrazu¯ rı¯’s.

4 Suhraward¯ı [152], para. 166.

5 Suhrawardı¯, *Talwı¯h. a¯ t*, para. 55, pp. 70–4. I translated it in Walbridge

[155], at 225–9, where references are given to other translations and

discussions of the dream.

6 Walbridge [155], 52–3.

7 Suhraward¯ı [152], para. 279.

8 The circumstances of Suhraward¯ı’s death and the reasons for it are discussed

in Ziai [159] and Walbridge [155], 201–10.

9 Suhraward¯ı [152], para. 3.

10 See Suhrawardı¯, *Le livre de la sagesse orientale: Kita¯b h. ikmat al-ishra¯q*,

ed. Christian Jambet (Paris: 1986), and the introductions to Suhraward¯ı,

*Majm¯ u‘a-yi mus.*

*annafa¯ t-i shaykh-i ishra¯q: Oeuvres philosophiques et*

*mystiques*, ed.H. Corbin, 3 vols. (Tehran: 1976–7), alongwith the works

of Corbin mentioned in n. 1 above.

11 See Walbridge [154], 194–5.

12 Idr¯ıs was a prophet casually mentioned in Qur’ ¯an 19:56 and 21:85. On

the general question of Hermes, including his identification with Enoch

and Idr¯ıs, see Walbridge [156], 17–24.

13 See Walbridge [155], 27–35.

14 P. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and*

*Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford: 1995).

15 Walbridge [155], 39–54.

16 Walbridge [156], 5–16.

17 Walbridge [154], 40–55, Walbridge [155], 21–3.

18 See Avicenna [205], Yazdi [157].

19 Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s argument and Averroes’ reply are found respectively in al-

Ghaz¯ al¯ı [111], chs. 11 and 13, and the corresponding sections of Averroes

[140], and more concisely in al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı [110], trans. R. J. McCarthy as

*Freedom and Fulfillment: An Annotated Translation of Al-Ghaza¯ lı¯’s*

*“al-Munqidh min al-D. ala¯ l” and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghaza¯ lı¯*

(Boston, MA: 1980), and Averroes [139].

20 Suhraward¯ı [152], paras. 101–5, 115; Walbridge [155], 157–64.

21 Walbridge [155], 164–81.

22 Suhraward¯ı [152], paras. 14–15, 70–1; Ziai [158], 77–127;Walbridge [155],

143–8; Walbridge [154], 101–4.

23 This term does not have a standard translation, so far as I know, nor is

there an exactWestern philosophical equivalent. “Transcendentals,” in

the medieval sense, comes close; “second intentions” is a little more

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distant and ought to be reserved for the corresponding term in logic,

*ma‘qu¯ la¯ t tha¯niyya*. In Walbridge [154], I used “intellectual fictions,” a

term I coined myself. In this article I use “beings of reason,” a medieval

term that I owe to my friend Paul Spade. On the general question of

existence and whether it is *i‘tiba¯ rı¯*, see T. Izutsu, *The Concept and*

*Reality of Existence* (Tokyo: 1971), 99–102.

24 Suhraward¯ı [152], paras. 56–68.

25 Avicenna [88], 29–36.

26 Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s “Metaphysics*,” trans.

J. P. Rowan (Notre Dame, IN: 1995), paras. 556–8.

27 Suhraward¯ı [152], paras. 72–88; Walbridge [154], 98–100; J. Walbridge,

“Suhraward¯ı on Body as Extension: An Alternative to Hylomorphism

from Plato to Leibniz,” in T. Lawson (ed.), *Reason and Inspiration:*

*Essays in Honour of Hermann Landolt* (London: forthcoming). The

physical portions of Suhraward¯ı’s so-called Peripatetic works are mostly

unpublished, though Ibn Kammu¯ na, *al-Tanqı¯ha¯ t fı¯ sharh. al-talwı¯h. a¯ t*,

ed. H. Ziai and A. Alwishah (Costa Mesa, CA: 2002) contains an extensive

discussion of bodies, matter, and form.

28 See Walbridge [154], chs. 32–9.

29 Suhraward¯ı’s science of lights is in the second part of his *Philosophy of*

*Illumination*. I have summarized it inWalbridge [154], 40–78, and more

concisely in Walbridge [155], 19–26.

30 Qut.b al-D¯ın Sh¯ır ¯az¯ı, *Sharh. h.*

*ikma al-ishra¯q*, ed. A. A. Hara¯ tı¯ ([Tehran]:

1895–7), 283.

31 Walbridge [154], 130–41. *The Theology of Aristotle*, trans. G. Lewis in

*Plotini Opera*, ed. P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer (Paris: 1959), vol. II,

219.

32 Suhraward¯ı [152], paras. 229–36;Walbridge [154], 141–9;Walbridge [156],

73–80. See further P. E. Walker, “The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in

Islam,” inW. B. Hallaq and D. P. Little (eds.), *Islamic Studies Presented*

*to Charles J. Adams* (Leiden: 1991), 219–38.

33 For the text and translation see Walbridge [154], 196–271.

34 Suhraward¯ı [152], para. 5. See also Ziai [159]; Walbridge [155], 201–10.

35 Suhraward¯ı [152], para. 6, 279–80.

36 Shams al-D¯ın al-Shahraz ¯ ur¯ı, *Sharh. h.*

*ikma al-ishra¯q*, ed. H. Ziai

(Tehran: 1993), English viii–21, Arabic passim. Qut.b al-D¯ın intersperses

commentary with the text while Shahrazu¯ rı¯ comments on blocks

of text.

37 Ibn Kammu¯ na, *al-Tanqı¯ha¯ t*. See H. Ziai, “Ebn Kammu¯ na,” in E.

Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (New York: 1999).

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38 See, for example, B. Kuspinar, *Isma¯ ‘ı¯l Ank. aravı¯ on the Illuminative Philosophy*

(Kuala Lumpur: 1996). Unfortunately, few of these texts have

been published and almost none translated into Western languages.

39 *The Desatir, or Sacred Writings of the Ancient Persian Prophets . . .*,

2 vols. (Bombay: 1818). H. Corbin, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “A¯ z.ar

Kayv¯an”; Walbridge [156], 91–105.

40 Suhraward¯ı [153]; Walbridge [155], 97–116; Walbridge [156], 105–10.

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11 Mysticism and philosophy:

Ibn ‘Arab¯ı and Mull¯a S. adr¯a

In a monotheistic culture of the “examined and contemplative

life,” the central intellectual challenge for a thinking, experiencing

believer is to address the question: how can I know God? and

concomitantly, how can I know what God means?1 In the classical

period, Muslim thinkers approached this question by delineating

four possible paths toward realizing, understanding, internalizing,

and implementing the “truth” or “reality.”2 These four ways are succinctly

and importantly examined in the famous “autobiography” of

the theologian andS.

u¯ fı¯ Abu¯ H. a¯mid al-Ghaza¯ lı¯ (d. 1111), *al-Munqidh*

*min al-d. ala¯ l* (*The Deliverer from Error*):3 the imitation of infallible

authoritative example (*ta‘l¯ım*, following the infallible Sh¯ı‘ite Im¯am),

acceptance of prophetic traditions and norms (*taql¯ıd* of the *Sunna*),

rational and discursive argument (*‘aql*, *naz.*

*ar*), and ineffable “pure”

experience or “taste” (*dhawq*). So the first question that needs to

be considered is the method of acquiring truth and certainty. In the

context of this chapter, the options that I shall consider are reason

and experience. In al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s account, the use of philosophical reason

is denounced for its failure to conform to “revealed truths,”4

while mystical experience is lauded: the difference is, as he puts it,

that reason is an indirect means of acquiring truth through the verification

of arguments, while “taste” experiences and directly takes

on the state of truth, effecting a critical complementarity between

knowledge and action.5 “Taste” has the added advantage of being a

Qur’ ¯anic concept and became the commonplace nomenclature for

experience in S.u¯ fı¯ circles. Thus it would seemthat early on in Islam,

we find reason and experience pitted against each other.6

However, our focus is upon the reconciliation of reason and experience

in the later Iranian traditions of philosophy in Islam, and on the

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recovery of a sense of philosophy that combined rational discourse

with intuitive experience. A second, ontologically prior question is

the diagnosis of the need for truth, a recognition of human ignorance

and “sickness” of the soul and mind that is devoid of truth and certainty

and is misled by unworthy passions and false beliefs. This is

the second theme that I want to pursue in this chapter: the discovery

of a method for inquiring into “truth” that is therapeutic and

even salvific. The aim of this chapter is to explain the relationship

between mysticism and philosophy in the later Islamic tradition,

focusing on the particularly illuminating relationship between the

S.

u¯ fı¯ thought of theAndalusian Ibn ‘Arabı¯ (d. 1240), the “rationalizing

mystic” *par excellence* of Islam, and the Illuminationist philosophical

tradition of Iran, represented by Mull¯a S. adr¯a al-Sh¯ır ¯az¯ı (d. 1640),

the Iranian “mystical philosopher” *par excellence*.

I want to consider mysticism and philosophy in later Islamic history

within the context of a Neoplatonic intellectual paradigm. The

late antique Neoplatonic traditions recognized numerous “ways” to

the truth, including that of the “rationalizing mystic” who is capable

of articulating a philosophical and discursive language for his

experiences that are non-propositional, non-conceptual, and even

lacking in “cognitive content” insofar as human reason can comprehend

it. Philosophy is here envisioned as a “way of life” and,

significantly, as a path to salvation. Similarly in Islam, there were

traditions of learning, thinking, and articulated experience that considered

it possible to rationalize and express the “ineffable” apophatically

and ironically, and considered inquiry to be a matter of soteriological

“realization” (*tah.*

*q¯ıq*).7 Here I have in mind particularly

late Islamic forms of Neoplatonism that are akin to the thought and

praxis of Iamblichus (d. ca. 325) and Damascius (d. ca. 538),8 the last

head of the Platonic Academy in Athens. Muslim thinkers followed

their Neoplatonic predecessors in a Pythagoreanizing insistence on

the necessity of “spiritual practices” and theurgy for philosophical

inquiry,9 a method of acquiring wisdom and ethical perfection and

salvation.10

It is often said (still!) that al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s critique and condemnation

of Neoplatonized Aristotelianism (*falsafa*) led to the demise of

philosophical inquiry in Islam. What it did effect was rather a shift in

both the conception of philosophy and the context of philosophical

inquiry: *falsafa* was absorbed into the sophisticated philosophical

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theology that was *kala¯m*, but also and more significantly in the

Islamic East, it was reconciled with mystical intuition and gnosis

(*‘irfa¯n*), providing itwith a language inwhich to articulate the results

of mystical experience and mediate its religious and ineffable language.

Islamic philosophy, consistent with its late antique predecessor,

was never a merely theoretical inquiry seeking knowledge

for its own sake, but was rather a transformative practice that combined

both “rational” and “arational” (*alogos*) elements.11 *Falsafa*,

or*h.*

*ikma* (“wisdom”) as it was increasingly named, provided a metalanguage

for explaining and analyzing the “pure consciousness experiences”

that were the inner, ineffable, and infallible domain of the

mystic. This transformation also affected the self-definition and

conceptualization of mysticism, urging upon mystics the need for

rationalizing, verifying, and especially “communicating” their mystical

experience. The goal of philosophy was not only to provide

an account of experience, but a (Platonic) method: a practice and an

ethics that would reveal how onemight emulate the moral paradigm

of the Good.

ibn ‘arabı￣ and mulla￣ s.adra￣

Shaykh Muh. y¯ı’ al-D¯ın ibn ‘Arab¯ı is perhaps the most famous of

medieval Islamic mystics.12 Born into a noble Arab family in Murcia,

he turned to the visionary and contemplative life early on and

sought out spiritual masters.His visions ofS.u¯ fı¯masters andQur’a¯nic

prophets impelled him to travel and blend his developing spiritual

insight with a practical “journey for truth”: this combination of

the spiritual and practical is stressed in the hagiographical tradition

about Ibn ‘Arab¯ı. He finally settled in Damascus, a prolific

author surrounded by many disciples, and died there in 1240. His

major works, especially *Fus.*

*¯ us.*

*al-h. ikam* (*Ring-settings of Wisdom*)

and *al-Futu¯ h. a¯ t al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*) were widely

disseminated and became the core texts of an interpretive community

in the Islamic East, especially in Iran.13 Ibn ‘Arab¯ı described

himself as one of theS.

u¯ fı¯s, who are “realized selves” (*muh. aqqiqı¯n*)

possessing true insight, open to divine disclosures and revelations

(*kashf*) in their souls, and to the experience of the “truth” (*Fut*. III,

34). He considered himself to be above most S.

u¯ fı¯s and disdained

philosophers.14 However, his superiority, as he saw it, lay in his use

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of intellectual insight. Though he did not consider himself a philosopher

(*faylasu¯ f*), later detractors accused him of being one and his

school tradition developed a more markedly philosophical explanation

for his mystical thought.15 What he proposed most explicitly

was a gnostic practice that would lead the seeker to an experience

of the Truth. He would claim that this experience was ineffable but

then would churn out quires explaining its states, a classic expression

of apophasis (negative theology) by a “rationalizing mystic.” Whilst

many have claimed that Ibn ‘Arab¯ı was a Neoplatonist philosopher

and monist, whose works constitute a mystical philosophy or even

a “theosophy” (that most unfortunate of labels), there is little sense

of a philosophical system or method in his articulation either of

rational knowledge or mystical experience.16 Rather, it is best to

describe him, as Merlan did the later Neoplatonists, as a “rationalizing

mystic”:17 the God that one experiences ultimately in rationalistic

mysticism is not above and beyond Being but is identical

to thought and being-thought-itself; there is absolute transparency

between the knower, the known, and knowledge itself.18 Thus mystical

experience, despite being a formof cognition that transcends all

concepts, is yet communicable and accessible to some diminished

discursive representation.

Similarly, a central feature of the method of Illuminationist

(*ishra¯qı¯*) philosophy is its integration of spiritual practice into the

pursuit of wisdom. A philosophical attempt at reforming Avicennism,

the tradition however retains a stress upon philosophical discourse,

and in its ontology posited metaphysical variance and plurality

rather than the monism of the school of Ibn ‘Arab¯ı. Thus one

finds in the work of Mull¯a S. adr¯a a compromise between the demands

of philosophy and mysticism, between monorealism and metaphysical

pluralism. A precocious talent born into a noble family of Sh¯ır ¯ az,

S.

adr al-D¯ın Muh. ammad, later known as Mull¯a S. adr¯ a, was one of the

major intellectual figures of Safavid Iran and the culmination of an

Illuminationist tradition which he irrevocably transformed. Having

studied in Is. fah¯an, the Safavid capital of Shah ‘Abb¯ as, he retired to

write and teach, first inQomand then inhis native Sh¯ır ¯az. He died in

1641 on his return from the ritual pilgrimage to Mecca, his seventh

that he had undertaken by foot. A keen commentator on Scripture as

well as the philosophical texts of the Avicennian and Illuminationist

schools, he was also profoundly influenced by the S.

u¯ fı¯ thought

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of Ibn ‘Arab¯ı. All these elements are illustrated in his major work,

*al-H. ikma al-muta‘a¯ liya fı¯ al-asfa¯ r al-‘aqliyya al-arba‘a* (*The Transcendent*

*Philosophy*/*Wisdom of the Four Journeys of the Intellect*),

commonly known as *al-Asfa¯ r al-arba‘a* (*The Four Journeys*).19 His

philosophical and hermeneutic method of achieving truth and realizing

it had a profound effect in later Islamic philosophy such that

the “school of Mull¯a S. adr¯a” has become the hegemonic philosophical

tradition of the Islamic East (see below, chapter 19). Characteristically

reconciling the demands and methods of reason and experience,

it would be best to describe him as a “mystical philosopher,”

a thinker who develops a philosophical system, method, and mode

of argument based upon the mystical experience of Reality. Indeed,

the key feature of his work is the use of experience as a means of

understanding, the grounds for explaining, the truth. Mull¯a S. adr¯a

himself often praises Ibn ‘Arab¯ı as a great spiritual master who has

realized truths, while Avicenna the discursive philosopher did not

quite make the grade of a “sage” (*Asfa¯ r* IX, 108).

mysticism and/or philosophy

The late antique philosophical traditions recognized the soteriological

and practical nature of philosophizing. Philosophy provided an

account of the soul and its salvation in its return to the One (or

the Principle/Cause) and freedom through discipline and training

against false beliefs and emotions. Thus, philosophy is the therapy

of the soul, an art for the diseased soul, dealing both with beliefs

and emotions, a familiar concept in Hellenistic and Neoplatonic

philosophy.20

But for our purposes, philosophy as an art that heals through the

rehearsal of arguments that respond to the specific needs of the sick

soul in a particular situation is insufficient. The practice of philosophy

as an inquiry must be supplemented and reconciled with philosophy

as a way of life and a commitment. This requires certain

disciplines and “spiritual exercises” (*riy ¯ ad.*

*a¯ t*). These practices are

of three types: physical practices including dietary restrictions and

self-mortification, contemplative practices such as meditation, and

discursive practices such as dialogue and pedagogy.21 Dialogue

and philosophical analysis itself could be therapeutic because

they could uncover false propositions and isolate the demands of

emotion.22 Divorcing the inquiry from the exercises would be akin

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to the state of interest in the Indian philosophical school (*darshana*)

of Yog¯a nowadays, in which most practitioners think of Yog¯a as

merely physical exercise, and are often unaware of both the “spiritual”

element of the exercises and the philosophical inquiry that

complements it.23

Thus philosophy in this holistic sense is a training of the soul,

stripping it of the “pluralizing tendencies” that emerge from acquiring

false beliefs and emotions. It is an interesting point to note that

the Stoics had a term to express the philosophical supervision and

vigilance of the soul, namely *prosokhˆe*,24 and theS.

u¯ fı¯ tradition that

Ibn ‘Arab¯ı and Mull¯a S. adr¯a inherited had an elaborate theory for the

supervision of the soul to avoid sins, temptations, and false beliefs.

Adepts were required to be ever-vigilant and disciplined over their

selves. The process involved a daily regime: at dawn, when theS.

u¯ fı¯

awoke, he would make a compact (*mu‘a¯hada*) with himself that he

would avoid both the temptations of the soul and body and would

avoid all that distracted him from the contemplation of the ultimate

reality. Continual watchfulness over the self during the day

was termed*mura¯qaba*. Finally, before sleeping, or generally at times

of introspection, theS.

u¯ fı¯ would judge and consider his actions, both

physical and mental, a process known as *muh. a¯ saba*.

However, it was the Platonic emphasis on *theosis* (or *ta’alluh* as

it was understood in the Arabic tradition),25 of “becoming god so

far as is possible” (*homoioˆ sis theoˆ i kata to dunaton anthroˆpoi*) as

the ultimate goal of philosophy that was taken up by the return

to Pythagoreanizing Neoplatonism of the later Iranian traditions. In

Plato’s *Theaetetus*, Socrates says:

Of necessity, it is mortal nature and our vicinity that are haunted by evils.

And that is why we should try to escape from here to there as quickly as we

can. To escape is to become like god so far as is possible and to become like

god is to become just and holy, together with wisdom.26

Thus philosophy is a soteriological path, a salvific practice that extricates

man from the evils of everyday life and holds out the promise of

achieving divinity by emulating the moral paradigmof the divine, the

Good.27 Philosophical perfection, for Mull¯a S. adr¯ a, results in social

order and salvation (*Asfa¯ r* I, 21.5). This emulation is reflected in

the*h.*

*ad¯ıth* famous amongS.

u¯ fı¯s that demands of the godly that they

“acquire the virtues of God” (*takhallaqu¯ bi-akhla¯q Alla¯h*).28 The

connection between this saying and *theosis* is made explicit by Ibn

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‘Arabı¯, and he says “that is S.u¯ fism” (*Fut*. II, 72.9, 126.8, 267.11). The

result of *theosis* is holiness, the attribute of living a good, virtuous

life, and justice, the attribute of recognition of moral norms and wisdom,

the state of seeing things “as they truly are.”29 Becoming like

God, the process of assimilation to the One, is merely the proper

return of the rational soul to its principle, a soteriology as well as an

ethics.30 *Ta’alluh*, according to Ibn ‘Arab¯ı, ensures that man is a theomorphic

being, the true viceregent of God on earth who can exhibit

divine virtue.31 That individual can display attributes of perfection,

which are divine traits and exhibit true value in moral agency (*Fut*.

II, 72.9, 126.8, 241). But there are critical limits: man cannot arrogate

for himself the role of God, since as Ibn ‘Arab¯ı says (*Fut*. II, 224.7), no

existent has independence, but everything reverts to God (quoting

Qur’ ¯an 11.123, inter alia).

One can recognize this important Platonic theme in Mull¯a S. adr¯a’s

definition of philosophy in the *Four Journeys* (*Asfa¯ r* I, 20.7–10), his

major work:

Know that philosophy is the perfecting of the human soul (*istikma¯ l al-nafs*

*al-insa¯niyya*) through cognition of the realities of existents as they truly

are (*kama¯ hiya*), and through judgments about their existence ascertained

through demonstrations (*bi-al-bara¯hı¯n*) and not understood through conjecture

(*bi-al-z. ann*) or through adherence to authority (*bi-al-taql¯ıd*) according

to man’s capability. Through philosophy, man ascribes a rational order to the

world and acquires a resemblance to the Creator according to the measure

of human capacity (*al-tashabbuh bi-al-B¯ ari’h.asab al-t.a¯qa al-bashariyya*).

There are seven discrete elements within this definition that need to

be drawn out. First, philosophy is a transformative practice designed

to perfect the soul. The perfection of the soul results in *tashabbuh*

*bi-al-Ba¯ ri’* (becoming likeGod). Second, philosophy is about a veridical

cognition of realities “as they truly are,” which suggests that

the central question within philosophical discourse is that of existence.

Third, philosophical discourse is conducted rationally through

the formulations of arguments and demonstrations, which are valid

Aristotelian syllogisms. Fourth, knowledge about existence is certain;

it cannot be a rehearsed theological argument nor can it be

a mere guess. Fifth, the limits of human reason and discourse are

due to the inadequacy of language and the ineffability of the One.

Sixth, philosophical understanding results in rational ordering of

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the cosmos and recognizing it as the macrocosmic manifestation of

the One, a central metaphysical doctrine in S.u¯ fı¯ thought. Because

God is a rational and determined Creator (an idea already found in

Plato’s *Timaeus*),32 man’s assimilation to him means that he begins

to see that created order in the cosmos. Finally, we return to the

theme of *theosis* (*ta’alluh*).33 Following the *Theaetetus*, wisdom is

the end of *theosis*; the sage is elevated above the masses. Throughhis

practice of philosophy combined with spiritual practices,34 the sage

acquires the qualities of generosity, good humour, fine judgment,

pronounced taste (*dhawq*), and the experience of spiritual disclosure

(*Asfa¯ r*, VI, 6.19–7.2).

The Avicennian tradition recognized the need to combine discursive

and intuitive, experiential thought in a higher synthesis

for which Avicenna himself coined the phrase *h.*

*ikma muta‘a¯ liya*

(transcendent philosophy), which is the term that Mull¯a S. adr¯ a, and

many within the school of Ibn ‘Arab¯ı, use for their method of

philosophizing.35 The contemplative ideal was present in Islamic

thought before it was given an explicitly mystical tone by Ibn

‘Arabı¯. Da¯ ’u¯ d al-Qays.arı¯, a preeminent commentator on Ibn ‘Arabı¯’s

*Fus.*

*¯ us.*

*al-H. ikam*, describes*h.*

*ikma muta‘a¯ liya* as the only true mode

of inquiry and as non-discursive philosophizing that can achieve

knowledge of God.36 However, Mull¯a S. adr¯a insists that true philosophy

is a reconciliation of discourse and intuition (*Asfa¯ r* VI, 5–8).

Indeed, the successful philosopher is one who can bring together his

rational effort with the grace of intuition that is received from above

in the formof divine knowledge from on high (*‘ilm ladunn¯ı*).37 Experience

is the ground for philosophy and philosophical discourse is a

means for making sense of that experience (*Asfa¯ r* IX, 108).38 In the

*Four Journeys* (*Asfa¯ r* III, 326), he says:

Our arguments are based upon direct experience and inner revelation and

not the blind following of the Law without proof, demonstration, or logical

inference. Mere inner revelation (*muka¯ shafa*) is insufficient on the path [to

truth] without demonstrations, just as mere discourse (*bah.*

*th*) without inner

revelation is a great flaw along the path.

Ibn ‘Arab¯ı had earlier derided the possibility of pure thought and discourse

to understand truth (*Fut*. II, 382.24–5, 389.6–7). Thought cannot

comprehend God, but constitutes a “veil,” since the affirmation

of one’s thought leads to an expression of one’s independence as

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a being; hence one cannot appreciate the exclusivity and unity of

Reality (*Fut*. II, 85.7).Discourse blinds man and leads to discordwhile

contemplation and inner revelation are non-discursive and fail to

achieve accord (*Fut*. III, 82.15–16). But man must exercise his reason

since it is an instrument of divine grace and he has been commanded

in the Qur’ ¯an to use it (*Fut*. II, 319.13ff., III, 436.7, 250, inter alia).

Ibn ‘Arab¯ı even praises Plato as a true “sage (*h.*

*ak¯ım*) with mystical

tastes” and not as a “mere philosopher” (*Fut*. II, 523). True sagacity

results from inner revelation and is an expression of prophetic

wisdom.39 Elsewhere, he quotes approvingly the famous “doffing

metaphor” concerning the soul’s beatific experience of the One in

the intelligible world that originates in Plotinus’ *Enneads*, IV.8.1,

which was translated into Arabic as the *Theology of Aristotle* (see

above, chapter 2). However, it seems that both Ibn ‘Arab¯ı and the Illuminationist

tradition correctly recognized this as a Platonic doctrine.

Finally, philosophy is a disciplined and taught spiritual practice.

As an ethical mode of life in the world, it cannot be blind to the need

for moral perfection and normative practice. Philosophy delivers the

good life and the Good itself for man but only if he is guided and

develops a moral character. Mull¯a S. adr¯a says:

The perfection of man lies in the perception of universal realities and disposition

toward cognition of the divine and transcendence above material

matters and self-purification from the constraints of carnal and passionate

appetites. This can only be acquired through guidance, teaching, discipline,

and the formation of a righteous character.40

The S.

u¯ fı¯ tradition also upholds the importance of spiritual training

as a method for the intuitive disclosure of reality. As such, both Ibn

‘Arab¯ı and Mull¯a S. adr¯a posit a spiritual hierarchy depending on the

varying dispositions to accept truth that are found among people. In

*¯ Iq¯ az.*

*al-na¯ ’imı¯n* (*The Awakening of the Dormant*), a work heavily

influenced by the thought and terminologyof Ibn‘Arab¯ı, Mull¯a S. adr¯a

discusses five levels of humanity in descending order of their ability

to cognize reality:

On the first level are people of inner revelation who know the Truth by forsaking

themselves and negating their being . . . They constantly contemplate

His signs.

On the second are the excellent philosophers who perceive Him in

a purely rational sense . . . Their ratiocination creates images through

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conjecture and their imagination produces forms appropriate to the most

subtle and noble rational forms [of things]. Yet they know that those rational

forms are above those conjectural and imaginative forms.

On the third are the common people of faith . . . The most that they are

capable of are conjectural conceptions [about the Truth].

On the fourth level are those who follow authority and are submissive.

They are not even capable of conjecture, let alone imagination.

On the fifth level are those who rely upon physical forms [to know] the

Truth.41

The hybrid discourse of Sadrian language is expressed in this hierarchy

that is in terms of levels of knowledge and insight, as well as

grace and disclosure, packed within the larger quest for truth and

recognition of God that is faith.

ontology: the grades of unitary reality

It is often said that the prime doctrine of rationalized mysticism

in Islam of the school of Ibn ‘Arab¯ı is that of the unity of Being

(*wah.*

*da al-wuju¯ d*): it underlies ontology, epistemology, and soteriology

(theory of salvation) in this tradition.42 This doctrine expresses

a desire for experiencing Being. The mystic’s quest is to discover and

experience God qua ultimate reality (*h.*

*aqı¯qa al-h. aqa¯ ’iq*) and in this

endeavor, he ultimately discovers and finds (*wajada*) the unity that

isGod. Ibn ‘Arabı¯ in his*magnumopus*, *al-Futu¯ h. a¯ t al-Makkiyya* (*The*

*Meccan Revelations*), in chapter 237 on Being, says (*Fut*. II, 537.33–

538.4):

Being of the Ultimate Reality (*wuju¯ d al-h. aqq*) is identical to what is found

through my ecstasy,

And I was annihilated in Being and through Being

The rule of ecstasy is that everything is annihilated through it

Yet the eye of ecstasy cannot know the hidden reality.

Pure consciousness of Being in every facet,

Through a mystical state or not is from it [Being].

Know that Being, according to the initiates, is the pure consciousness of

the Ultimate Reality (*wijda¯n al-h. aqq*) through ecstasy (*wajd*). They [the

initiates] say that if you are not seized by ecstasy, and if, during this state,

you do not contemplate the Ultimate Reality, then you are not [really] in

ecstasy, because the fact of contemplating it should annihilate from you

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your self-contemplation and the contemplation of that which is present to

you. [Thus] you are not seized by ecstasy if you have not “found” Ultimate

Reality in that state. Know that the Being of the Ultimate Reality

is not known (*ma‘lu¯m*) in ecstasy, because the ecstasy is coincidental and

what is coincidental is unknown and may have arisen through some other

state.

Since being and what is “found” through pure experience are the

same (and rendered by the same term in Arabic, *wuju¯ d*, which literally

means “what is found”), only God is worthy of the name “being”

(*wuju¯ d*). Ibn ‘Arabı¯ (*Fut*. I, 328.15 and III, 566.30, inter alia) carefully

articulates the view that “the ultimate reality is identical to

what is found (*al-wuju¯ d*).” Crucially, the method of finding must be

“ecstatic,” through a mystical experience, and this is made explicit

by linking the experience in the passage above to the S.

u¯ fı¯ institution

of sessions of “audition” (*sama¯ ‘*). True *sama¯ ‘* involves ecstasy

and true ecstasy responds to *sama¯ ‘* as humans respond to the speech

of God articulated in it (*Fut*. ch. 172 on the station of audition, II,

366.27–32). Thus mystical intuition and rationalization follow from

an appreciation of the meaning of revelation both through Scripture

and through “nature.” A key feature of his method is the Qur’ ¯anicity

of his rationalization. Ibn ‘Arab¯ı’s language is thickly Qur’ ¯anic and

he refers to Qur’ ¯an 24:39.

But two questions arise: in what sense is God identical to Being,

and does it follow that nothing else exists (including the very mystic

who is recognizing this reality)? These two questions are connected

through the idea that Being as such only refers to God insofar as he

is a pure, unconditioned, unqualified, and hidden Being. He is solitary

in being.43 Yet this does not mean plural phenomena are unreal,

but only that they are self-disclosures and theophanies of the single

Being. Existents (or things “found” in the universe, *mawju¯ da¯ t*),

therefore, to use the Avicennian language employed by Ibn ‘Arab¯ı,

are contingents that have no existence or Being in themselves but

exist through the grace of Being in which they participate. They are

thus manifestations of Being, differentiated from one another insofar

as they are either sensible (*mah.*

*su¯ s*) or intelligible (*ma‘qu¯ l*), and by

virtue of the varying “dispositions” that God has placedwithin them

to act as a mirror for his Being (*Fut*. II, 160.1–8).

The doctrine of the unity of being or monism has important repercussions

for the two other sets of doctrines: an apophatic mystical

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theology (and resultant skepticism), and a soteriology or theory of

salvation. Firstly, then, the recognition that there is a single Being,

and that our phenomenal experience of pluralism is an illusory perception

of the manifest disclosures of that Being, results in a problem

of language. If only God is worthy of the title of Being, then there

is nothing else that we can use as an analogy to grasp Being. Thus

for us humans, being in itself is rendered meaningless, or at the very

least we cannot fully comprehend either what Being is or communicate

our “experience” of it. Our being is “not-being” (*Fut*. III, 362).

The second, soteriological result is that our state of ignorance and

“existential poverty” with respect to Being44 places us in a humbled

position inwhich the pride of saying “I exist” gives way to the uncertainty

of “I am not sure that I exist.” Mull¯a S. adr¯ a, while accepting

the doctrine of the unity of being with qualifications (see below),

appropriates this idea of existential poverty into his account of the

modality of contingency, of all that is made necessary by another

(*al-wa¯ jib bi-al-ghayr*) (i.e., by theNecessary Being). He uses the term

“contingency of poverty” (*imka¯n faqrı¯*). This follows from the tradition

stemming from Ibn ‘Arab¯ı that considers all existents that

depend on another, and “annex their existence from the other” (that

is, they have relational existence, *al-wuj ¯ ud al-id.*

*a¯ fı¯*), as being “essentially

privative.”45 Ibn ‘Arab¯ı himself draws upon Qur’ ¯an 35:15, “O

mankind! You are poor before God,” to articulate his theory of the

existential indigence of all that is not the divine essence. Further,

once one realizes that there is a single Being that is the goal (*gha¯ya*) of

every existent, then one knows that every existent, whether microcosmic

man or macrocosmic universe, is itself merely a “mirror”

of that Being. It is the ethical implication of this that restricts the

possible vice of pride that may result from *ta’alluh* (*Fut*. I, 196).

Though we speak here of monism, the doctrine of the unity of

being does not entail a hypostatic continuity and unity of God,

cosmos, and man. The three “realities” are not one person, a gross

misunderstanding of Ibn ‘Arab¯ı that Mull¯a S. adr¯a calls the doctrine of

the hypostatic unity of being (*wah.*

*da al-wuj ¯ ud al-shakhs.*

*iyya*).46 The

schools of Ibn ‘Arab¯ı and Mull¯a S. adr¯a make a distinction between

Being (*wuju¯ d*), which is solely applicable to God, and existence

(*mawju¯ d*), which applies to all that there is insofar as they are theophanies

of divine names and acts.God is existent (*mawju¯ d*) insofar as

he is disclosed to us, but Being insofar as he is unknown and unseen

(*ghayb*). There is a unity of Being but existence is not a singular

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reality. It is our self-conceptualization as existing entities that assists

us in recognizing divine existence, since our awareness of our selves

is the basis for the central cosmological proof for God.47 Contingency

is an essential feature of the cosmos (*Fut*. III, 275, 443; *Asfa¯ r*

II, 318ff.). Using the language of philosophy, Ibn ‘Arab¯ı expresses it

thus (*Fut*. II, 69.3–4):

The existence attributed to each created thing is the existence of the Reality,

since the contingent does not possess being. However, the entities of

contingents are receptacles for the manifestation of Being.

We acquire existence from him, and the contingency of our existence

is the basis of both epistemology and ontology in this tradition.

Thus far, we discern a distinction between Being, the absolute

prerogative of the One, and existence, a derivative mode of being

that applies to contingent beings. Whilst this distinction may also

be articulated in terms of the Avicennian distinction between existence

and essence in contingent beings (the Necessary does not bear

this distinction), in our thinkers this distinction is not connected to

the notion of essence, because of the critical (Sadrian) doctrine of the

“ontological primacy of being” (*as.a¯ la al-wuju¯ d*). A major question

of post-Avicennian thought is whether, given Avicenna’s distinction

between existence and essence, it is existence or essence that is

actual and ontologically prior (see above, chapter 6). Since both of

our thinkers regard essences as inert, mental notions that are empty

(i.e., without reference in reality), existence or Being must be the

actual principle (*Asfa¯ r* I, 61–3).

Being is thus taken as primary, and phenomenal existence as the

arena of its unfolding. This is reflected in a doctrine of three levels

of unfolding Being, which expresses the God–cosmos relationship.

S.

adr¯a sees this doctrine also as a mystical explanation for his own

theory of metaphysical variance around a singular Being: the “modulation

of being” (*tashkı¯k al-wuju¯ d*). Beyond the three degrees of

existence is the unseen and ineffable essence that is the ultimate

mystery (*al-dha¯ t*, *ghayb al-ghuyu¯ b*), as he is the pure Being beyond

existence. God qua Absolute Being (*al-wuju¯ d al-mut. laq*) is utterly

unknowable (*Fut*. I, 118, inter alia). Yet the three degrees themselves

provide the basis for a more positive theory of theological discourse,

insofar as they are equated with the divine attributes. Corresponding

to the first degree are the intrinsic attributes, which refer to

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the essence in which there is no duality (*al-ah.*

*adiyya*) and in which

the divine essence is emanated to the other attributes through the

Most Holy Emanation (*al-fayd. al-aqdas*). The second and third levels

correspond to two types of extrinsic attributes. The second level

consists in those manifestations of the divine in which God is said

to see, hear, and so forth. This level marks the onset of alterity and

duality (*al-w¯ ah.*

*idiyya*). The third and final level is the emanation of

the attributes through the Holy Emanation (*al-fayd. al-muqaddas*),

and the divine creative command and Breath of the Merciful (*Nafas*

*al-Rah.*

*ma¯n*). It is only at this third, lowest level that God is considered

as related to the world, as it is this level that explains the

coming into existence of the cosmos.

The Breath of the Merciful (*Nafas al-Rah.*

*ma¯n*)48 is the process by

which Being becomes manifest and things obtain their existence in

the cosmos according to the level of their “disposition” to receive the

manifestation of Being in themselves.49 It is also this creative breath

that issues and sustains the cosmos (*Fut*. II, 123.26). It is Being that is

spread out (*munbasit.*

) and manifest. It is identical to the primordial

cloud of being (*al-‘ama¯ ’*), the “dust” (*al-haba¯ ’*), primematter, and the

primal element discussed in Presocratic thought (*Fut*. II, 431–2, 310,

390; *Asfa¯ r* II, 329, 331.9, 333.17). Prime matter as the foundational

substrate is an uncaused cause of all things that we perceive in phenomenal

reality.50 The breath is the exoteric and subaltern aspect

of divine Being: it is the reality that is created and creates (*al-h. aqq*

*al-makhlu¯ q bi-hi*) (*Asfa¯ r* II, 328.10).51 It is identical to the reality of

realities (*h.*

*aqı¯qa al-h. aqa¯ ’iq*) that bestows “reality” to each existent

in the cosmos (*Fut*. II, 432–3, IV, 311). As such it is known as the

“universal reality” (*al-h. aq¯ıqa al-kulliyya*) (*Fut*. I, 119, III, 199). This

level of Being unfolding is the key source for existence in this world

and the variety of names given to it reflects an attempt to reconcile

different creation myths and accounts of the primordial substance

and source of existence. With respect to its principle, it is a passive

substance, an inert potency requiring divine Being to actualize it; but

with respect to its objects, it is that which creates. As an intermediary,

it links divine Beingwith existents in this world whilst retaining

an ontological distinction between the two. The recipients of the

breath and its loci are described by Mulla¯ S. adra¯ (*Asfa¯ r* II, 328.4–5)

in terms characteristic not only of the Ibn ‘Arab¯ı school but also

the Illuminationists: they are the “temples of contingency” (*haya¯kil*

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*al-mumkin¯ at*) and “tablets of quiddities” (*alw¯ ah.*

*al-ma¯hiyya¯ t*). It is

the Breath of the Merciful that gives existence to things that we

experience in this world. It seems that Mull¯a S. adr¯a wishes to modify

his monism whilst retaining a link between the three levels of

being, descending from the One, through its first level of manifestation,

through to the secondary manifestation in existents in this

world. In an Avicennian system, arguably the work of the Breath is

carried out by essences before they are actualized in this world, but

Mull¯a S. adr¯a’s insistence upon the unreality of essences necessitates

the substitution of some mode of being which he finds in Ibn ‘Arab¯ı’s

notion of the Breath of the Merciful.

But we still have the problem of the reality of existents in this

world. They do not possess existence in themselves but may be conceptualized

as existent by grasping them throughuniversals. In *Fus.*

*¯ us.*

*al-h. ikam* Ibn ‘Arab¯ı writes:

Know that universal entities, even though they do not possess existence

in themselves, are intelligible and knowable insofar as one can ascribe

existence to them. They can be considered to exist in themselves but [in

themselves] they can be neither divisible nor differentiated. They exist in

themselves through every individual of a species that is ascribed to them,

such as individual humans in relation to humanity, but they neither differentiate

nor are multiplied by multiple individuals, remaining intelligible

[only]. (*Fus.*

*¯ us.*

I, 52.15–53.4)

Phenomenal existence insofar as it is multiple and conceptual is not

true Being, but rather it is granted its existence through true Being.

This is a corollary of the idea that essences in themselves do not exist

in concrete reality but are merely notional and intentional. So, contrary

to what one might expect, the distinction between (necessary)

Being and (contingent) existence is not provided by the existence–

essence distinction as articulated by Avicenna. For the Avicennian

distinction in the later tradition was read as a purely notional/mental

distinction. Ibn ‘Arabı¯ says in *Insha¯ ’ al-dawa¯ ’ir*, in perpetuation of

this Averroist reading of the Avicennian doctrine:

Know that existence and nonexistence are not added to an existent or a

nonexistent, but are identical to the existent and the nonexistent. It is only

estimation that imagines that existence and nonexistence are attributes that

refer to an existent and a nonexistent . . . Existence and nonexistence are

merely expressions for the affirmation and the negation of a thing.52

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What is actual and is found exists. Existence is thus neither an accident

nor a mere property of an entity. Mull¯a S. adr¯a similarly has

little use for the Avicennian distinction, but takes from Ibn ‘Arab¯ı

the importance of the foundational reality of existence, the notion

of *as.a¯ la al-wuju¯ d* that we encountered above, in opposition to the

Illuminationist rejection of existence (expressed by Suhraward¯ı: see

chapter 10) as a mere concept that has no basis in what is actual.53

Mull¯a S. adr¯a considers that the term “existence” applied to the cosmos

and other than God is meaningful only because the concept

has grades of sense and reference, a point whose ontology has been

expressed above in the notion of degrees of reality (*Asfa¯ r* I, 37–8).

While the ground of Being remains God qua the Ultimate Reality, all

that exists manifests Being in grades of manifestation, distinguished

through a logic of “intensification” (*ishtida¯d*). As Mulla¯ S. adra¯ says

(*Asfa¯ r* VI, 277.1–3),

Existence has degrees of existentiality, and Being possesses different modes,

some of which are more perfect and more noble, and others which are more

imperfect and more base, such as the divine realm, the intelligible realm,

the psychic realm, and the natural realm of existence.

Mull¯a S. adr¯a is thus not caught between monism and pluralism, but

rather seeks to escape the paradigms offered by Ibn ‘Arab¯ı by attempting

to produce a synthesis based on the notion of grades of intensity

within a singular reality. Different intensities mean different degrees

of content in our experience of things, corresponding to greater and

lesser degrees of the manifestation of Being.

epistemology: via negativa and

realist skepticism

One epistemological result of monism and the recognition of the

utter existential poverty of the self is the elevation of the idea that

“one does not know,” of “ignorance” that is typical of apophasis in

the Platonic tradition. In the Neoplatonic tradition, there are two

types of knowledge: philosophical insight and self-knowledge (intuition).

But they are not necessarily opposed to each other. Similarly

in the thought of Ibn ‘Arab¯ı, direct experience (*dhawq*) and disclosure

(*kashf*) is contrasted with reflection and reason (*‘aql*), while

necessary and certain knowledge is contrasted with probabilistic

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understanding (*Fut*. I, 319.28–35). But in Mull¯a S. adr¯ a, they are complementary,

as we have seen above in his definition of the quest for

truth.

The Socratic maxim“I know that I do not know” is quoted approvingly

by Ibn ‘Arab¯ı and is linked to unwitting self-awareness (*Fut*.

II, 84.11, III, 22.12). Similarly, true knowledge is ignorance (*Fut*. I,

728.18–20). Ibn ‘Arab¯ı says (*Fut*. II, 552.25–27):

He who has not knowledge imagines that he knows Reality/God but that is

invalid, since a thing cannot be known except through the positive attributes

of itself, and our knowledge of this is impossible, so our knowledge of Reality

is impossible. So glory be to He who is known by the fact that He cannot be

known. The knower of God does not try to get beyond his rank. He knows

that he is one of those who do not know.

A further reason why knowledge of Reality is so elusive is that

knowledge of Reality would be infinite, since Reality itself is infinite

and is manifest through infinite relationships. Knowledge of these

relationships would require that our finite minds grasp infinity, but

this is impossible (*Fut*. II, 671.5).

Being and existence are elusive for Mull¯a S. adr¯a too. This is a paradoxical

result of the doctrine common in medieval philosophy that

existence is an immediate notion that arises naturally in the mind –

it is both the most common and immediate of notions and yet a true

understanding of its very reality is hidden and undisclosed (*Asfa¯ r* I,

260). Thus Mull¯a S. adr¯a says in the *Four Journeys*:

The Pure One is the cause of all things and not all things. Rather it is the

principle of everything and not everything. All things are in it and not in it.

All things flow from it and subsist and are sustained by it and return to it.

(*Asfa¯ r* VII, 272–3)

This paradoxical nature of the relationship between Being and its

existents results in a problem. If Being is elusive and yet immediate,

how can one know whether one has grasped it? For Mull¯a S. adr¯ a, the

desire to “grasp” an existent in the mind is to reify and essentialize

it. As such it no longer remains concrete “existence” but becomes

an essence in themind (*Asfa¯ r* I, 37). Thus one cannot knowexistence

through intellection.

A further result of the experiential path and the doctrine of

monism is that the perception of the heart dominates over the

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perception of the mind, or intellection, in Ibn ‘Arab¯ı; for it is only

the heart (following a famous saying of the Prophet) that can embrace

Reality (*Fut*. III, 129, 250). This contrastmirrors the contrast between

learned knowledge and its limitations and gnosis of reality (*ma‘rifa*),

which is a result of grace and disclosure in the heart: it is practical,

pious, and leads to truth along a mystical path (*Fut*. II, 316.9–10).

soteriology: a salvational psychology

The philosophical focus of our two thinkers is the notion and reality

of Being. Everything follows from its inquiry. It forces us to investigate

its nature, its origins, and its culmination. The soul as a psychic

being needs to understand its ontological beginning and end. It

is a key tenet of Neoplatonism that the physical world is not the

proper abode of the soul. The soul must revert to its origin and principle

the One, the ultimate source of its being, and thus be saved

from the vicissitudes and confines of the material and the base. It is

the practice of philosophy, the combination of discursive and nondiscursive

thought with intuition and experience of the One, that

transforms and moves the soul toward this goal. It is in this sense

that later Islamic philosophy combines the practice of philosophizing

and mystical experience to effect a soteriological change in the

soul. As such, later Islamic philosophy in its approach to philosophy

and mysticism represents a strong continuity with late antique

Neoplatonic traditions.

A healthy soul, one that moves toward its salvation and goal, is

a soul unfettered and unobstructed by divisions within itself. It is

a unity that has a plurality of functions and faculties, a psychological

expression of the metaphysics of monism and the gradation of

phenomenal realities in the thought of Mull¯a S. adr¯a. While the soul

may be pulled in different directions by its desires, beliefs, and faculties,

the training of philosophy is designed to reintegrate it and

discipline it. Philosophy is a transformative discipline designed to

create a particular kind of self/soul.

Two crucial practices and ideas provide the means of the integration

of the soul. The first is love (the *eros* of the Platonic tradition).54

The second is focus upon immutable moral principles and objective

norms,55 provided by the desire to seek the return to the One and

the beatitude of experiencing the presence of the One. As we have

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seen, the practice of mysticism and quest for the experience of Reality

is a process whereby one can escape this world and be “saved.”

Philosophical discourse and practice for Mull¯a S. adr¯a is precisely the

means for this salvation. Thus a key feature of the later traditions of

philosophy in Islam after their encounter with mysticism is a reappropriation

of the soteriological elements in the Neoplatonic tradition.

These were among the elements of Neoplatonism most conducive

to a reconciliation with a religious worldview, a worldview

that seeks to understand the nature of reality by discerning both a

meaning for humanity, and an account of salvation and sustenance

in an everlasting life.

notes

1 Making sense of revelation and its product, revealed texts, is a central

hermeneutic concern of Muslim mystics and philosophers. There are

established genres ofS.

u¯ fı¯ and philosophical exegeses of the Qur’a¯n and

the prophetic dicta, and both Ibn ‘Arab¯ı and Mull¯a S. adr¯a wrote such

exegeses as primary expressions of their mystical intuition and philosophy.

For a more general attempt by philosophers to make sense

of the “given” of revelation, see J. E. Gracia, *How can we Know*

*what God Means?* (London: 2002); W. Alston, *Divine Nature and*

*Human Language: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, NY: 1989);

and R. Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (Oxford:

1992).

2 The same word in Arabic renders these two terms, *al-h. aq¯ıqa*, and

thinkers have played upon the ambiguity of the Arabic term.

3 Al-Ghaza¯ lı¯, *al-Munqidh min al-d. ala¯ l*, ed. F. Jabre (Beirut: 1959), 16–40;

cf. E. Ormsby, “The Taste of Truth: The Structure of Experience in al-

Ghaza¯ lı¯’s *al-Munqidh min al-d. ala¯ l*,” in W. Hallaq and D. Little (eds.),

*Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J*. *Adams* (Leiden: 1991), 133–4.

4 Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, *al-Munqidh*, 25–7.

5 Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, *al-Munqidh*, 40.10–11.

6 See, for example,O. Leaman, “Philosophy versus Mysticism: An Islamic

Controversy,” in M. McGhee (ed.), *Philosophy, Religion and the Spiritual*

*Life* (Cambridge: 1992), 177–87; W. Chittick, “Mysticism versus

Philosophy in Earlier Islamic Philosophy,” *Religious Studies* 17 (1981),

87–104.

7 Myintellectual debt to the seminal work of Pierre Hadot and Andr’e-Jean

Voelke (and to a certain extent, Martha Nussbaum) for this conception

of philosophy as therapy of the soul, and as praxis oriented toward

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salvation, should be clear enough not to need indication. But for references,

see P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. M. Chase

(Oxford: 1995), esp. 49–70, 81–125, 264–75, and *What is Ancient Philosophy?*

trans. M. Chase (Cambridge, MA: 2002), esp. 15–21, 55–233.

8 See S. Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive Thinking in the*

*Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius* (Cambridge: 2000); H. D.

Saffrey, *Le n´eoplatonisme apr`es Plotin II* (Paris: 2000), 129–41; D.

Taormina, *Jamblique: critique de Plotin et Porphyre* (Paris: 1999), esp.

133ff.

9 Of particular significance here are two texts of Iamblichus, *On the*

*Pythagorean Life* and his commentary on the Pythagorean *Golden*

*Verses*, the latter of which was available in Arabic. See H. Daiber (ed.),

*Neuplatonische Pythagorica in arabischem Gewande: der Kommentar*

*des Iamblichus zu den* Carmina Aurea: *ein verlorener griechischer Text*

*in arabischer U¨ berlieferung* (Amsterdam: 1995).

10 Cf.Walbridge [155]. Of course, onemight say that this is more accurately

a Platonic intention of philosophy, and indeed this is how it was understood

in Islam, as an expression of the thought of the “divine Plato”

(*al-Afl ¯ at.*

*u¯ n al-ila¯hı¯*). For an argument that the goal of Platonic philosophy

is, through providing metaphysical foundations, the articulation of

*phronˆesis* and ethics of *eudaimonia*, see J.M. Rist, *Real Ethics: Rethinking*

*the Foundations of Morality* (Cambridge: 2002), esp. chs. 1 and 2;

for an alternative reading of the Platonic texts, see J. Annas, *Platonic*

*Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca, NY: 2000).

11 Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* 81.

12 The best spiritual and intellectual biography of him is C. Addas,

*Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arab¯ı*, trans. P. Kingsley

(Cambridge: 1993).

13 Ibn ‘Arab¯ı [163] and [164]. Hereafter cited as *Fus.*

*¯ us.*

and *Fut*. respectively.

14 Like al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, he often attacks philosophers for holding heretical

views. See Ibn ‘Arab¯ı, *Fut*. III, 401.20, 536.16–18.

15 On the accusation, see Alexander Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arab¯ı in the Later Islamic*

*Tradition: TheMaking of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam*(Albany,

NY: 1999), 113–17.

16 Rosenthal [169], 5–7.

17 Given Ibn ‘Arab¯ı’s fondness for the *coincidentia oppositorum*, this term

is very apt for him. See H. Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism*

*of Ibn ‘Arab¯ı*, trans. R. Manheim (Princeton, NJ: 1969), 205–15.

18 Philip Merlan, *Monopsychism, Mysticism, Metaconsciousness: Problems*

*of the Soul in the Neoaristotelian and Neoplatonic Traditions*

(The Hague: 1963), 20–1.

19 Mulla¯ S. adra¯ [166]; hereafter *Asfa¯ r*.

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20 R. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind* (Oxford: 2000), 17–19; Hadot,

*Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 87–90.

21 Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* 6.

22 Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, 159–60.

23 This quite apposite example is suggested by Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace*

*of Mind*, 161.

24 Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*, 13; Hadot, *Philosophy as aWay of*

*Life*, 84.

25 On which see Annas, *Platonic Ethics*, ch. 3; D. Sedley, “The Idea of

Godlikeness,” inG. Fine (ed.), *Plato, II: Ethics, Politics, Religion and the*

*Spiritual Life* (Oxford: 1999), 309–28, and J. Domanski, *La philosophie:*

*th´eorie ou mani `ere de vivre* (Paris: 1996), 5–9.

26 Plato, *Theaetetus*, 176a6–b3, trans. Sedley, “The Idea of Godlikeness,”

312.

27 See Plato, *Laws*, 716c.

28 Evinced by Mull ¯a S. adr ¯a, *Asf ¯ ar* I, 21.6, 22.4; cf. Ibn ‘Arab¯ı, *Fus.*

*¯ us.*

55.

29 Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* 69.

30 Sedley, “The Idea of Godlikeness,” 320.

31 See Ibn ‘Arab¯ı, *Fut*. I, 118.9, II, 187.17–18. However, instead of explicitly

referring to *ta’alluh*, Ibn ‘Arab¯ı prefers talking about acquiring divine

virtue because becoming godlike may easily be misunderstood in a

strictly monotheistic society.

32 The connection was suggested by Walbridge [155], 90–1.

33 Cf. *Asfa¯ r* III, 446.

34 *Asfa¯ r* I, 22. The complementarity of philosophical discourse and spiritual

practices is stressed in the Illuminationist tradition. Suhraward¯ı

himself makes this explicit in Suhraward¯ı [152], 162.11–15.

35 Avicenna used the term in *al-Isha¯ ra¯ t wa al-tanbı¯ha¯ t*, ed. M. Shiha¯bı¯

(Tehran: 1996), vol. III, 399.21, in his discussion of the separable intellects.

His commentatorNas.ı¯r al-Dı¯n al-T. u¯ sı¯ (d. 1274) explained that this

method of philosophy combined discourse (*bah.*

*th*)with intuition (*kashf*)

and experience (*dhawq*) – see vol. III, 401.3. Avicenna’s student, Bahmany

¯ar, also stressed the significance of contemplation as a higher cognitive

form than mere discourse – see *Kit ¯ ab al-tah.*

*s.*

*¯ıl*, ed.M. Mut.ahhar¯ı

(Tehran: 1996), 816.16–17.

36 S. J. D. ¯ Ashtiy¯an¯ı, *Sharh. -i muqaddima-yi Qays.*

*ar¯ı bar Fus.*

*¯ us.*

*al-h. ikam*

(Tehran: 1991), 280.

37 Mulla¯ S. adra¯ ,*Mafa¯ tı¯h. al-ghayb*, with scholia of ‘Alı¯ Nu¯ rı¯, ed.M. Kha¯ javı¯

(Tehran: 1984), 41.

38 Ibn ‘Arabı¯ says that *al-Futu¯ h. a¯ t al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*)

is based on mystical experience and divine revelation (*kashf*); see *Fut*.,

II, 389, 432.

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39 The inadequacy and superfluity of reason is indicated in his gloss upon

the Qur’ ¯anic description of the Prophet Muh.ammad as *umm¯ı* (understood

to mean “illiterate”). Knowledge is acquired not from the books

of philosophers but from prophetic experience and disclosure. See Ibn

‘Arab¯ı, *Fut*. II, 595.32, 644.

40 Mulla¯ S. adra¯ , *Asra¯ r al-a¯ya¯ t wa anwa¯ r al-bayyina¯ t*, with marginalia of

‘Alı¯ Nu¯ rı¯, ed. M. Kha¯ javı¯ (Tehran: 1984), 132.5–7.

41 Mull ¯a S. adr ¯a, ¯*Iq¯ az.*

*al-na¯ ’imı¯n*, ed. M. Mu’ayyadı¯ (Tehran: 1982),

69.2–19.

42 Ibn ‘Arab¯ı himself never used the term, but the concept is made explicit

from commentaries on his work, especially the *Fus.*

*¯ us.*

, and from the

work of his disciples and followers, beginning with his stepson S.

adr

al-D¯ın al-Qunaw¯ı (d. 1274). See Chittick [160], 3.

43 The solitude of Being that the divine qua unconditioned reality possesses

explains the desire and need for it to create something by which

it may be known, the prime creation myth of the school of unity of

being expressed in the divine words expressed on the tongue of the

Prophet Muh. ammad, “I was a hidden Treasure (*kanzan makhfiyyan*)

but was not known. So I loved to be known and I created the creation

and made myself known to them. Then they came to know

me.” Love thus becomes the impulse for creation. See Ibn ‘Arab¯ı,

*Fut*. II, 232.11–12, inter alia, and *Kita¯b al-awra¯d al-usbu¯ ‘* (Istanbul:

1299 A.H.), trans. P. Beneito and S. Hirtenstein as *The Seven Days*

*of the Heart* (Oxford: 2000), 115, in which he supplicates that God

may bring him to contemplate the “solitude of your Being” (*wah.*

*dat*

*wuju¯ dika*).

44 The existential poverty is asserted through the recognition that man

does not even possess his own existence and that when he seeks out

his existence or that of any phenomenal object, he only finds God (as in

Qur’ ¯an 24:39). See Ibn ‘Arab¯ı, *Fut*. ch. 328 on the Muh. ammadan Presence

(*al-h. ad.*

*ra al-Muh. ammadiyya*), III, 105.8–25.

45 See ‘Abd al-Razz¯aq K¯ash¯an¯ı, *Is.*

*t.*

*il ¯ ah.*

*¯ at al-s.*

*u¯ fiyya*, ed. A. Sprenger, repr.,

*A Glossary of Sufi Technical Terms* (London: 1991), 28.

46 *Asfa¯ r* I, 68–9.

47 Ibn ‘Arabı¯, *al-Tadbı¯ra¯ t al-Ila¯hiyya*, in *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn ‘Arabı¯*,

ed. J.Nyberg (Leiden: 1919), 208: “God is found [exists,*mawju¯ d*] and we

are existents (*mawju¯ da¯ t*). If we did not conceive of our own existence,

we would not have been able to cognize the importance of Being nor

affirmthat the Creator exists. He created in us the faculty of knowledge

so we realized that he possesses the attribute of knowledge and that he

is knowing, and similarly through our life we knew that he possesses

life.”

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48 Ibn ‘Arab¯ı, *Fut*. II, 60, 426–7, III, 77, 150, 354, 420, 444. For a discussion

of the pseudo-Empedoclean aspects of this doctrine, see D. de Smet,

*Empedocles arabus: une lecture n´eoplatonicienne tardive* (Brussels:

1998).

49 Ibn ‘Arab¯ı, *Fus.*

*¯ us.*

I, 112, 219; *Fut*. II, 394, 426. The Breath of the Merciful

is a reference to the creative breath when God blew his spirit into Adam;

see Qur’ ¯an 15:29.

50 Ibn ‘Arabı¯, *al-Tadbı¯ra¯ t al-Ila¯hiyya*, 122–3.

51 This term is first used by Ibn Barraj ¯an (d. 1191) of Seville as attested by

Ibn ‘Arab¯ı, *Fut*. II, 60.12, 104.6.

52 Ibn ‘Arabı¯, *Insha¯ ’ al-dawa¯ ’ir*, in *La production des cercles*, trans. P.

Fenton andM. Gloton, ed. J. Nyberg (Paris: 1996), 5.10–16 in the Arabic.

53 Suhraward¯ı [152], 45–51.

54 See Rist, *Real Ethics*, 95ff.

55 Rist, *Real Ethics*, 117.

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12 Logic

A chapter on logic in an introductory book on Islamic philosophy

could legitimately be expected to cover a range of topics, from the

argument techniques used by ninth-century theologians and jurists

to the semantical analyses of the fourteenth-century grammarians.1

But by the late tenth century, the Arabic word commonly translated

as “logic,” *mant. iq*, had come to refer almost exclusively to

Peripatetic traditions of distinguishing a good from a bad argument,

and those are the traditions to which this chapter is limited. This

means that the Arabic logical writings examined here are, like their

medieval Latin counterparts, concerned with a problematic arising

from the Aristotelian texts; more than medieval Latin logic, however,

the dominant tradition of Arabic logic is mainly at one remove

from those texts, as will be exemplified below.

Even with this limitation, the writings which fall under the

chapter’s remit stretch from 750 to the present day, covering the

whole course of subjects developed in the *Organon*. For practical

purposes, I impose the further limitation of referring the material

covered back to *al-Risa¯ la al-shamsiyya*, the *Logic for Shams al-Dı¯n*

by Najm al-D¯ın al-K¯atib¯ı (d. 1276).2 I do so because down to the

twentieth century it was commonly the first substantial text on

logic which a Sunn¯ı Muslim would study in the course of a *madrasa*

education.3 Because the problematic considered by the *Shamsiyya*

acquired its precise form in Avicenna’s writings, and acquired its

commonly accepted resolution by the late thirteenth century, I will

not consider any logical work written after this time. This should

not be taken to imply that original work in logic came to an end in

1300, but rather that other problems had taken center stage.

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I begin this chapter by making a few comments on the pitfalls

awaiting the historian of Arabic logic. I then sketch in broad terms

historical aspects of the tradition to which the *Shamsiyya* belongs,

and the way that tradition came to be represented in the *madrasa*

curriculum. I describe the contents of the *Shamsiyya* to give some

idea of the range of topics covered by the average student of logic.

I then note certain elements of al-K¯atib¯ı’s treatment of the modal

syllogistic and examine its predecessors. I conclude by attempting a

broad characterization of later Arabic logic.

preliminary considerations

Whereas the study of medieval Western logic is now an established

field of research, contributing both to modern philosophy of logic

and to the intellectual history of the Middle Ages, the study of logic

in the precolonial Islamic world is still barely in its infancy. That fact

alone makes it difficult to write an introductory chapter on the field:

we are as yet unclear what contributions of the logicians writing in

Arabic are particularly noteworthy or novel. It is also a dangerous

temptation in this state of relative underdevelopment to cast an eye

too readily on the work of the Latin medievalist, and to import the

methods, assumptions, and even the historical template that have

worked so well in the cognate Western field.

This temptation must be resisted at all costs. There are many

important differences between the scholarly ideals and options of

the LatinWest and the MuslimEast; there are, also, many differences

between the various fortunes encountered by rigorous logical activity

in the two realms over the centuries.Aglance at the historiographical

preliminaries of Bochenski’s *History of Formal Logic* prompts the

following observations.4 First and foremost, Aristotle ceases by the

end of the twelfth century to be a significant coordinate for logicians

writing in Arabic – that place is filled by Avicenna. The centrality of

Avicenna’s idiosyncratic system in post-Avicennian logical writings

and the absence of Aristotelian logic in a narrowly textual sense

meant that Arabic texts dealing with Avicenna’s system were left

to one side by the medieval Latin translators. Instead, other, less

influential texts by Averroes and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı were translated, because

they did concentrate on Aristotle and spoke to thirteenth-century

Western logical concerns. Even at the outset, then, the insignificance

of Aristotle’s logical system in the Avicennian tradition worked to

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distort Western appreciation of the relative importance of particular

logicians writing in Arabic.

A second difference is that the whole range of Aristotelian logical

texts were available in Arabic by about 900, and so the broad periodization

of medieval Latin logic into *logica vetus* and *logica nova* is

inappropriate as a way of periodizing logic written in Arabic;5 by the

time serious logical work began, the complete *Organon* was available.

Avicenna’s work marks the watershed for any helpful periodization.

Thirdly, Bochenski’s analysis of what preconceptions and historical

meanderings clutter the way to the proper study of medieval

Western logic (the collapse of acute logical study with the demise of

scholasticism, the ahistorical reductivism of post-Kantian logic, the

institutionalization of a psychologistic logic in neoscholasticism)6

do not apply to the study of the logic of medieval Muslim scholars –

even in the early twentieth century, it is clear that at least some

scholars were still in contact with the acute work of the thirteenth

century. There had been far less of a rupture in logical activity over

the intervening centuries. On the other hand, there have been postcolonial

efforts to find later Western logical achievements foreshadowed

in early Arabic logic, and this has damaged the prospects for

appraisal of the work by leading to a disproportionate focus onminor

traditions.7

Finally, only some of the characteristics Bochenski finds which

distinguish medieval Western logic from the logic of late antiquity

apply to the logic being written in Arabic at roughly the same time.8

It too is highly formal and metalogical in its treatment, and pedagogically

central; but no doctrine like supposition was developed,

and there seems to have been far less concern with antinomies. One

may say – nervously, given the current state of research – that Arabic

logic is somewhat closer to the logic of late antiquity in its concerns

and methods than medieval Latin logic. That said, one must guard

against an obvious alternative assumption, which is that Arabic logic

is by and large just one or other of the systems of late antiquity.9 We

already have enough control over Avicenna’s logic to know that is

false.

the tradition of logic and the madrasa

The average learned Muslim from the late thirteenth century on

acquired some logic as part of his intellectual arsenal. Very often,

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that logic had been acquired from the lovely little textbook, the

*Shamsiyya*, perhaps the most studied logic textbook of all time.

The *Shamsiyya* belonged to and reflected a tradition which had its

own peculiar features. Further, the *Shamsiyya* had found a home in

the *madrasa* curriculum in the face of opposition from some quarters.

I examine aspects of each of these matters in the following

subsections.

*The form and substance of the tradition*

As a religious community, Islam had first come in contact with a

living logical tradition when the Muslim armies coming out of the

peninsula in the seventh century took control of the Fertile Crescent

where Christian communities had made logic an important part of

their studies. The logic they studied was a shortened version of what

had been taught in the Alexandrian curricula of the sixth century,

limited to the *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, and the assertoric syllogistic

of the *Prior Analytics* (which is to say, up to the end of the

seventh chapter of the first book).10 There are various reasons given

for why the Christians stopped at that point (al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı was later to

write that it was due to a synodal decree, but there are good reasons

to doubt that was the reason),11 but probably it was because that

was the simplified basic logic they received. It was that basic logic

which was translated from Syriac into Arabic in the second half of

the eighth century.

The first Arabic translations of logic were executed, then, at the

beginning of the ‘Abb¯asid regime. No universally valid generalization

can be made about how the translations proceeded, but by and

large logical summaries were translated, then texts or fragments of

texts from the *Organon*, then commentaries on those texts of the

*Organon*; again, by and large, translations went from Greek to Arabic

by way of the Syriac. Even the earliest translations are, however,

an exception to that process; the earliest surviving text translated,

by Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ (d. 757) in the 750s, was indeed a summary, but

we know that it was made at roughly the same time as a translation

of the *Topics*.12 The early efforts gave way to better translations

by better-organized translators, and by the mid-ninth century

there were highly skilled translators working in the circle of al-Kind¯ı

(d. ca. 870) and, somewhat later, in the circle of H.

unayn ibn Ish. ¯aq

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(d. 873). Though some of the logic texts translated were still descendants

of the Alexandrian summaries, more and more texts of the

*Organon* were translated and retranslated. The *Organon* texts were

ultimately furnishedwith commentaries by scholars of late antiquity

like Alexander, Ammonius, and Themistius.H.

unayn had particular

veneration for Galen, and many Galenic logical works now lost were

available to the Arabs.

It was not until the rise of the Baghdad Peripatetics, marked by

the activities of Abu¯ Bishr Matta¯ ibn Yu¯ nus (d. 940) and al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯ (d.

950), that logicians started to focus closely on the *Organon* itself. Al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı came to conceive his task as clearing awaymisinterpretations

of the Aristotelian text, many the result of the Syriac summaries, and

reviving true Peripatetic doctrine after a period of rupture. The Baghdad

Peripatetics who carried on the work of Abu¯ Bishr and al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯

were able by about 1000 to produce a heavily annotated version of

the *Organon* which was accurate enough for close exegesis.13 The

Farabian tradition, both in Baghdad until the mid-twelfth century

and in Spain where it ended somewhat after the time of Averroes

(d. 1198), would always be concerned with this kind of exegesis.

At the same time the final version of the Arabic *Organon* was

being achieved, a young philosopher from Khur¯as¯an, Avicenna (d.

1037), had set about changing forever the course of Islamic philosophy.

Avicenna claimed for himself, by virtue of his Intuition (*h.*

*ads*),

the ability to judge the Peripatetic tradition, and to be in a position

to say what philosophical doctrines Aristotle should properly have

come to.14 One aspect of his philosophical activity particularly relevant

for present purposes led him to reinterpret sections of the *Prior*

*Analytics*, and it is his reinterpretation which served as the object

of study and debate among later scholars in his tradition rather than

the original Aristotelian system.

The leaders of this Heroic Age of Arabic logic, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and

Avicenna, dealt with the books of the *Organon* one by one. But

after them, a major change in focus occurred in the tradition, here

described by Ibn Khaldu¯ n (d. 1406), the first (and still greatest) historian

of Arabic logic.

The later scholars came and changed the technical terms of logic; and they

appended to the investigation of the five universals its fruit, which is to

say the discussion of definitions and descriptions which they moved from

the *Posterior Analytics*; and they dropped the *Categories* because a logician

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is only accidentally and not essentially interested in that book; and they

appended to *On Interpretation* the treatment of conversion (even if it had

been in the *Topics* in the texts of the ancients, it is nonetheless in some

respects among the things which follow on from the treatment of propositions).

Moreover, they treated the syllogistic with respect to its productivity

generally, not with respect to its matter. They dropped the investigation of

[the syllogistic]with respect to matter, which is to say, these five books: *Posterior*

*Analytics*, *Topics*, *Rhetoric*, *Poetics*, and *Sophistical Fallacies* (though

sometimes some of them give a brief outline of them). They have ignored

[these five books] as though they had never been, even though they are important

and relied upon in the discipline. Moreover, that part of [the discipline]

they have set down they have treated in a penetrating way; they look into it

in so far as it is a discipline in its own right, not in so far as it is an instrument

for the sciences. Treatment of [the subject as newly conceived] has

become lengthy and wide-ranging – the first to do that was Fakhr al-D¯ın al-

R¯az¯ı (d. 1210) . . . The books and ways of the ancients have been abandoned,

as though they had never been.15

By the time al-K¯atib¯ı wrote the *Shamsiyya*, at the height of the

Golden Age of Arabic logic, the discipline had changed from ranging

over all the subjects covered in the *Organon* to concentrating on narrowly

formal questions. And, as did all at his time, al-K¯atib¯ı wrote

on those questions as developed by Avicenna.

*The study of logic*

This is how the *Shamsiyya* acquired the form and focus it has. How

did it come to be studied in the *madrasa* – how, in short, did Islam

embrace a Greek-derived science at its educational heart? At the time

of the translation movement, some Muslim religious scholars were

open to the study of logic, some less so. One of the most commonly

cited examples of antipathy to logic in Muslim intellectual circles is

that expressed by a grammarian, Abu¯ Sa‘ı¯d al-Sı¯ra¯ fı¯, in a debate that

took place in the 930swith one of Baghdad’s leading Peripatetics, the

Abu¯ Bishr Matta¯ mentioned above. The debate touched on a number

of complex issues, but most significantly for present purposes

it serves to show how doubtful scholars were about claims for the

utility of Greek logic. Al-Sı¯ra¯ fı¯ taunted Abu¯ Bishr about his trust in

logic: “The world remains after Aristotle’s logic as it was before his

logic . . . you can dispense with the ideas of the Greeks as well as

you can dispense with the language of the Greeks.”16

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Al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯, spurred by Abu¯ Bishr’s humiliation, set about showing

how logic complemented the Islamic sciences. This he did by showing

that logic underpinned and guaranteed the arguments deployed

in theology and law. In his book *The Short Treatise on Reasoning*

*in the Way of the Theologians*, “he interpreted the arguments of the

theologians and the analogies of the jurists as logical syllogisms in

accordance with the doctrines of the ancients.”17 In *The Short Treatise*,

we find analyses of the paradigmatic argument, of the argument

used by Muslim theologians called “reasoning from the seen to the

unseen,” and of the “juristic argument” itself.18 This programmatic

defence of logic was adopted by an important Muslim jurist, Abu¯

H.

¯amid al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı (d. 1111), who prefaced his most famous juristic

digest with a short treatise on logic, saying that knowledge of logic

was indispensable for a proper control of jurisprudence.19 Logic was

thereafter widely recognized as a necessary part of a scholar’s training.

The way that recognition had been won led subsequent writers

of logic manuals to consecrate at least a part of their manuals to the

reduction of juristic argument forms to the syllogism, a reflex carried

over from this early time when Muslim scholars contested the

place of logic in Islamic society.

The Farabian strategy succeeded in making logic a commonly

studied discipline, but dissenting voices could still be heard. A

famous condemnation of logic, issued by Ibn al-S. al ¯ah (d. 1245), lets

us see how pious doubts arose about the discipline.

As far as logic is concerned, it is a means of access to philosophy. Now

the access to something bad is also bad. Preoccupation with the study and

teaching of logic has not been permitted by the Lawgiver. The use of the

terminology of logic in the investigation of religious law is despicable and

one of the recently introduced follies. Thank God, the laws of religion are not

in need of logic. Everything a logician says about definition and apodictic

proof is complete nonsense. God has made it dispensable for those who

have common sense, and it is even more dispensable for the specialists in

the speculative branches of jurisprudence.20

But as a formal system, logic is unobjectionable, and an influential

jurist and famous hater of logic, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), was prepared

to concede that point, albeit rather mockingly:

The validity of the formof the syllogismis irrefutable . . . But it must bemaintained

that the numerous figures they have elaborated and the conditions

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they have stipulated for their validity are useless, tedious, and prolix. These

resemble the flesh of a camel found on the summit of a mountain; the mountain

is not easy to climb, nor the flesh plump enough to make it worth the

hauling.21

contents of the shamsiyya

There is much in the structure of the *Shamsiyya* that is familiar to

anyone who has looked at medieval Latin treatises on logic, particularly

the division of the three main parts of the treatise (parts 2, 3,

and 4) into Terms, Propositions, and Syllogism.22 There are other

deep similarities, especially the way logic is defined, and the way

the treatment of universals is developed. Much of the material would

work perfectly well as an introduction to logic in the medievalWestern

tradition; it is, like its Latin counterparts, ultimately descended

from the Aristotelian texts.

1. Introduction

(a) What logic is

(b) Subject matter of logic

2. Terms

(a) Utterances

(b) Individual concepts

(c) On universals and particulars

(d) Definition

3. Propositions

(a) Introduction: definition of proposition and its parts

(b) On the categorical proposition

i. Parts thereof, and kinds

ii. On quantification

iii. On equipollence and existence

iv. On modal propositions

(c) On the hypothetical proposition

(d) On rules governing propositions

i. Contradiction

ii. Simple conversion

iii. Obversion

iv. Equivalences among hypothetical propositions

4. Syllogisms

(a) Definition of “syllogism,” and its kinds

(b) Syllogisms with mixed premises

(c) On conjunctive syllogisms with hypothetical propositions

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(d) On repetitive syllogisms

(e) Further matters to do with syllogistic

i. Linked syllogisms

ii. Reduction

iii. Induction

iv. Example

5. Conclusion

(a) Syllogistic matter

(b) On the parts of the sciences

Still, some points in the *Shamsiyya* would not serve to introduce

material treated by its Latin contemporaries, most especially the

division of the syllogistic, the division of different kinds of discourse,

and the modal logic.

The division of the syllogistic in nearly all works belonging to

the dominant Avicennian tradition reproduces a division set out by

Avicenna and claimed by him to be one of his own innovations.

According to what we ourselves have verified, syllogistic divides into two,

conjunctive (*iqtira¯nı¯*) and repetitive (*istithana¯ ’ı¯*). The conjunctive is that in

which there occurs no explicit statement [in the premises] of the contradictory

or affirmation of the proposition in which we have the conclusion;

rather, the conclusion is only there in potentiality, as in the example we

have given. As for the repetitive, it is that in which [the conclusion or its

contradictory] occurs explicitly [in the premises].23

The division probably relates to epistemic questions to do with perfecting

syllogisms, and ramifies through to the analysis of the proof

by reduction to an impossibility, both topics too complex to be

explored here.Averroes criticized it as a division, and he and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı

used an alternative division common in the Latin tradition.24

Another strange aspect of the *Shamsiyya* relative to its Latin contemporaries

is its section devoted to syllogistic matter (*al-ma¯dda*

*al-qiya¯ siyya*). This was referred to above in the quote taken from

Ibn Khaldu¯ n, who said that the later logicians “dropped the investigation

of [the syllogistic] with respect to matter, which is to say,

these five books: *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, *Rhetoric*, *Poetics*, and

*Sophistical Fallacies* (though sometimes some of them give a brief

outline of them)” – the brief outline became a way to deal with the

later parts of the Alexandrian arrangement of the *Organon*. The syllogism

was taken to be what formally underlies all arguments, but

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propositions making up those arguments may differ; these differentiated

stretches of discourse manipulated by the syllogism in turn

determine what kind of argument is produced, be it demonstrative,

dialectical, rhetorical, poetical, or sophistical. There was dispute

about the criteria to differentiate syllogistic matter, but in the

Avicennian tradition to which the *Shamsiyya* belongs, the criteria

were epistemological.25

the modal syllogistic

With that we come to the modal syllogistic, perhaps the most foreign

of the *Shamsiyya’s* doctrines. It is not obvious from the table of

contents given above just how much of the *Shamsiyya* is given over

to the modals; one needs to realize that the sections on contradiction,

conversion, obversion, and syllogismswithmixed premises are all on

modal logic, amounting to over eight pages of the twenty-eight and

a half pages of Sprenger’s printing. In other words, nearly one-third

of an introductory treatise is given to modal logic. Throughout its

treatment of the modals, a distinction between the *dha¯ tı¯* and *was. fı¯*

readings of the proposition crops up again and again. Whence comes

this distinction, unknown in the West?

To answer this question, we need to return to the Aristotelian system.

Let us consider the following famous problem. Aristotle wants

this syllogism to be valid:

(1) Every *c* is *b*, every *b* is necessarily *a*, therefore every *c* is

necessarily *a*.

but he wants to reject the next syllogism:

(2) Every *c* is necessarily *b*, every *b* is *a*, therefore every *c* is

necessarily *a*.

The “necessarily” in the first, valid, syllogism, seems to belong to

the predicate term “*a*”; that is, the full predicate of the second and

third propositions in (1) is “necessarily *a*.” This is what is referred to

among medieval Latin writers as a *de re* reading of the modal proposition.

At the same time, Aristotle wants the proposition

(3) Every *a* is necessarily *b*.

to convert as

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(4) Some *b* is necessarily *a*.

which suggests that he reads “necessarily” in this case as belonging

to the whole proposition rather than merely to the predicate term;

he is taking the proposition (3), in short, as “necessarily, every *a* is

*b*.” Taking the proposition to assert that “every *a* is *b*” is necessary

is to take it in what is known among medieval Latin writers as a *de*

*dicto* reading. The problem is that if the *de dicto* reading is adopted,

then syllogism (1) is no longer valid; if the *de re* reading is adopted,

the conversion of (3) no longer goes through as (4). Aristotle never

refers to the distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* readings, and

seems to propose a uniform reading for his modals throughout the

exposition.26 Is he right to do so?

*The Farabian tradition*

At this point, I will take a considerable detour through the earliest

Arabic treatment of the modal logic, so I can examine the way

the Farabian tradition tried over two and a half centuries to refine

a solution to the problem. When al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı began his work in the

early tenth century, he had the relevant chapters of the *Prior Analytics*

(chs. 8–22 of book I, translated by an otherwise unknown collaborator

working with H.

unayn ibn Ish. ¯aq, probably finished some

time between 850 and 875), and a mass of commentatorial material

translated three or four decades later, probably including Alexander,

Ammonius, Themistius, and others.We have lost the work inwhich

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı set out his exegesis, but his approach to one particular problem

was explicitly adopted and extended by Averroes (d. 1198).27 By

and large, the Farabians wanted to give a way to make sense of the

difficult passages inAristotle’s modal syllogistic, and proffered ways

of construing the text to do that. Their interests were exclusively textual,

in the sense that it is hard to picture a freestanding system that

would make the distinctions their exegetical posture led them to

make. They did not make use of the distinction between *de re* and

*de dicto* readings. But they accepted the validity of syllogism (1), the

invalidity of syllogism (2), and tended to focus their concerns on the

proper converse of (3). One concrete counterexample to the inference

of (4) from (3) that Farabian logicians dealt with was:

(5) Every literate being is necessarily a human being,

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which, given the way things are, seems to be true, but which would

convert to the untrue

(6) Some human being is necessarily literate.

Developing a distinction found in Aristotle between terms taken to

be *per se* (*bi-al-dh¯ at*) and *per accidens* (*bi-al-‘arad.*

*)* – too complex

for the present chapter – the Farabians would hold “literate being”

to be merely *per accidens*, expressing a peculiarity had only by the

predicate, human being, but not had necessarily by any. So (5) is only

true as a *per accidens* necessary proposition because one of the terms

is only *per accidens*. “Human being,” by contrast, is said of things

essentially, that is, *per se*. Aristotle only intends to be able to infer

(4) from (3) if (3) is a *per se* necessary proposition, with *per se* terms

like

(7) Every human being is necessarily an animal.

A simplified version of this approach was adopted by medieval Latin

logicians, notably Robert Kilwardby (d. 1279), though we are unable

to say what source he may have followed. Here is his statement of

the argument:

When it is said: “Every literate being is necessarily a human being,” this

subject is not something which can be said *per se* of this predicate, but since

“literate being” is not separated from that which belongs to a human being

itself, the proposition is conceded to be necessary, but when a proposition is

necessary in this way it is necessary *per accidens*. Therefore, when Aristotle

says that necessary propositions are convertible, he means only that the

propositions which are necessary *per se* are convertible.28

In another essay, Averroes gave a statement of a series of problematic

passages in Aristotle, followed by a declaration of why he

wanted to find a solution to them:

These are all the doubts in this matter. They kept occurring to us even when

we used to go along in this matter with our colleagues, in interpretations by

virtue of which no solution to these doubts is clear. This has led me now

(given my high opinion of Aristotle, and my belief that his theorization is

better than that of all other people) to scrutinize this question seriously and

with great effort.29

Nothing could better characterize the way the Farabian approaches

the Aristotelian text; and it is this approach which Avicenna rejects.

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*The Avicennian tradition*

Which is not to say Avicenna had little respect for Aristotle, or that

his syllogistic is presented without reference to the system of the

*Prior Analytics*. But Avicenna was sure he knew the system which

Aristotle was trying to put forward, and used that system as a way to

judge when to depart from the literal sense of the text. On a related

point, he said:

You should realize that most of what Aristotle’s writings have to say about

the modal mixes are tests, and are not genuine opinions – this will become

clear to you in a number of places.30

The Avicennian approach to the problem of interpreting Aristotle

was to accept (1), reject (2), and then simply reject the claim that (3)

converts as (4). The counterexample Avicenna used was *every laughing*

*being is necessarily a human*. It is obvious that it will convert

to *some humans are laughing*,

but it does not necessarily convert as a necessary, for it may be that the

converse of the necessary is possible; it may be that J (such as *laughing*)

necessarily has B (such as*man*), but that B (such as*man*) does not necessarily

have J (such as *laughing*). Whoever says otherwise, and has sought to find a

stratagem for it, do not believe him.31

One of the stratagems expressly ruled out by Avicenna is the

Farabian.32 In other words, Avicenna did not seek to exclude certain

propositions from the Aristotelian rule, he just changed the rule. The

Farabians changed their system to fit the text, Avicenna changed the

text to fit his system.

That said, Avicenna did develop his own stratagems to save

Aristotle’s text. One of these stratagems is the *was. fı¯/dha¯ tı¯* distinction

whose origin we seek, which he introduced when discussing

propositions in a necessary mode, but which he first used

in discussing propositions with no explicit modality (what he called

“absolute” propositions).33 Here is the introduction of the different

readings:

Necessity may be (1) absolute, as in *God exists*; or it may be connected

to a condition. The condition may be (2) perpetual for the existence of the

substance (*dha¯ t*), as in *man is necessarily a rational body*. By this we do not

mean to say that man has been and always will be a rational body, because

that would be false for each given man. Rather, we mean to assert that while

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he exists as a substance, as a human, he is a rational body. Or the condition

may be (3) perpetual for the subject’s being described (*maws.*

*u¯ fan*) in the way

it is, as in *all mobile things are changing*; this is not to be taken to assert

that this is the case absolutely, nor for the time [the subject] exists as a

substance, but rather while the substance of the moving thing is moving.

Distinguish between this condition and the first condition, because the first

has set down as the condition the principle of the substance, “man,” whereas

here the substance is set down with a description (*s.*

*ifa*) that attaches to the

substance, “moving thing.” “Moving thing” involves a substance (*dha¯ t wa*

*jawhar*) to which movement and non-movement attach; but “man” and

“black” are not like that.34

How did Avicenna use this distinction? A *dha¯ tı¯* reading is like the

*de re* reading mentioned above, whereas the *was. f¯ı* reading takes a

proposition like *every a is necessarily b* as properly *every a is necessarily*

*b while a*. The distinction is probably best explained by example.

*All who are sitting may be standing* is true as a *dha¯ tı¯* reading;

each person who sits can at a later time stand, all other things being

equal. Under this reading, all men are necessarily rational, all young

men may be old men, all bachelors may be married men, and all

who are sleeping are waking. In the *was. f¯ı* reading, *all men are necessarily*

*rational* is still true, but *all who are sitting may be standing*

taken as a *was. f¯ı* (which is to say, *all who are sittingmay be standing*

*while sitting*) is false. False too are the propositions claiming that

all bachelors may be married men, and that all who are sleeping are

waking.

The right way to understand Aristotle’s syllogistic was as a system

involving propositions in the *dha¯ tı¯* reading and, so understood, the

converse of (3) is not (4). Was there a way to have Aristotle’s claim

make sense? By taking (3) in the *was. f¯ı* reading. In fact, according

to Avicenna, the move from (3) to (4) was not the only place where

Aristotle needed to be read charitably, nor was it the only place the

*was. f¯ı* reading could help. He also thought it could preserve the Aristotelian

stipulations for the contradictories and converses of absolute

propositions. Nas.ı¯r al-Dı¯n al-T. u¯ sı¯ (d. 1272), one of Avicenna’s great

thirteenth-century commentators, tells us why Avicenna developed

the distinction:

What spurred him to this was that in the assertoric syllogistic Aristotle and

others sometimes used contradictions of absolute propositions assuming

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them to be absolute; and that was why so many decided that absolutes did

contradict absolutes. WhenAvicenna had shown this to be wrong, he wanted

to give a way of construing [those examples from Aristotle].35

the nature of later arabic logic

It is from Avicenna’s exercise in exegetical charity that al-K¯atib¯ı and

his predecessors found the distinction they deployed so extensively.

It is instructive to examine how al-K¯atib¯ı used the distinction, and

some of the results to which he came, because that in turn illustrates

certain characteristic aspects of later Arabic logic.

Firstly, al-Ka¯ tibı¯ never brought the *dha¯ tı¯*/*was. fı¯* distinction to bear

on any problem inAristotle’s *Prior Analytics*, nor, for that matter, on

any problem in Avicenna’s logic. Al-K¯atib¯ı was setting down a system

of modal logic, not writing a commentary on someone else’s system.

But the system he put forward was based closely on Avicenna’s.

In other words, the system to which immediate reference was made

by the later logicians writing in Arabic – al-K¯atib¯ı is representative

in this respect – was Avicenna’s, not Aristotle’s.

Secondly, on looking at the specific deductions in al-K¯atib¯ı’s treatment,

one finds the following: if the premises are in the *dha¯ tı¯* reading,

then syllogism (1) is valid, and syllogism (2) invalid. The converse of

(3) in the *dha¯ tı¯* reading is not (4), but nor is it the one-sided possible

that Avicenna took it to be. Al-K¯atib¯ı took its converse instead to be

a proposition in the *was. f¯ı* reading, *some b is at least once a while*

*b* – I will not go into his proof for the conversion here. So although

the system was based closely on Avicenna’s, it was not Avicenna’s.

It was rather a modification of that system, and the modifications

were in some cases extensive. Among other things, they made the

system completely useless for one of the tasks Avicenna had inmind

when he produced it, which was to use it tomake sense of Aristotle’s

*Prior Analytics*.

We may say that later Arabic logic is Avicennian, then, but that

claim should be understood fairly specifically. Firstly, it is Avicennian

in that the base system taken as the object of debate and

repair is Avicennian. And secondly, it is Avicennian in its attitude

to past authority – just as Avicenna had rejected Aristotle’s

doubtful claims, so too the later logicians writing in Arabic felt free

to reject Avicenna’s doubtful claims.36 Further, they did not share

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his interest in the work of the First Teacher. But by developing,

extending, and repairing the various logical insights of Avicenna

as exposited through his conversation with Aristotle’s *Organon*,

these later logicians offered up vast quantities of material on important

logical problems. It is the task of present and future generations

of scholars to begin to take stock of the quality of this

material.37

notes

Thanks are due to Henrik Lagerlund, John Marenbon, Rob Wisnovsky,

and the editors of this volume for reading this chapter and offering

various helpful suggestions.

1 For information on these interesting topics, see respectively J. van Ess,

“The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology,” in von Grunebaum [184],

21–50; and B. Weiss, “*Ilm al-Wad.*

*‘*: An Introductory Account of a Later

Muslim Philological Science,” *Arabica* 34 (1987), 339–56.

2 The whole of the *Shamsiyya* is available in translation, though a new

translation is overdue. See A. Sprenger (ed. and trans.), *Bibliotheca*

*Indica: A Collection of Oriental Works*, no. 88: *First Appendix to the*

*Dictionary of Technical Terms used in the Sciences of the Mussulmans,*

*containing the Logic of the Arabians* (Calcutta: 1854); this partial translation

is completed in Rescher [178], 39–45. Rescher added to his translation

a somewhat faulty analysis of the logic; he corrected it later in

his study with A. vander Nat [180].

3 In Sh¯ı‘ite seminaries, the commentary by al-‘All¯ama al-H. ill¯ı (d. 1325)

on the *Tajr¯ıd al-mant. iq* of Nas.ı¯r al-Dı¯n al-T. u¯ sı¯ (d. 1274), the *Jawhar*

*al-nad.*

*ı¯d fı¯ sharh. Kita¯b al-tajrı¯d*, served in the role of introductory logic

text.

4 I. M. Bochenski, *A History of Formal Logic*, trans. I. Thomas (Notre

Dame, IN: 1961); see esp. “On the History of the History of Logic,”

4–10.

5 See, e.g., K. Jacobi, “Logic: The Later Twelfth Century,” in P. Dronke

(ed.), *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy* (Cambridge:

1988), 227–51, at 236ff. Cf. S. Pines, “A Parallel in the East to the *Logica*

*Vetus*,” in Pines [37], 262–6, and Gutas [57].

6 Bochenski, *History*, 6–9.

7 As an example, see the introduction of the otherwise extremely valuable

Jabre et al. [174], v–ix.

8 Bochenski, *History*, 152.

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9 Made for example by Madkour [176], at 268–9.

10 See, e.g., Gutas [56], 246.

11 See Gutas [57].

12 Gutas [58], 61.

13 Peters [61], 7–30; cf. Lameer [175], ch. 1. See also H. Hugonnard-Roche,

“Remarques sur la tradition arabe de l’*Organon* d’apr`es le manuscrit

Paris, Biblioth`eque nationale, ar. 2346,” in Burnett [50], 19–28; and

the review of the chapter by J. Lameer, “The *Organon* of Aristotle

in the Medieval Oriental and Occidental Traditions,” *Journal of the*

*American Oriental Society* 116 (1996), 90–8.

14 Gutas [93], 197–8; see the revised treatment of*h.*

*ads* by Gutas in “Intuition

and Thinking: The Evolving Structure of Avicenna’s Epistemology,”

in Wisnovsky [104], 1–38.

15 Ibn Khaldu¯ n, *Prole´gome`nes d’Ebn-Khaldoun: texte arabe,* part 3, ed.

M. Quatrem`ere (Paris: 1858), 112–13; cf. the translation by F. Rosenthal

in his *The Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldun* (London: 1958), vol. III, 142–3.

16 D. S.Margoliouth, “TheDiscussion between Abu¯ BishrMatta¯ and Abu¯

Sa‘¯ıd al-S¯ır ¯ af¯ı on the Merits of Logic and Grammar,” in *Journal of the*

*Royal Asiatic Society* (1905), 79–129 at 115–16; cf. Endress [172], 163–

299.

17 Al-F¯ar ¯ab¯ı, *Kit ¯ ab al-qiy ¯ as al-s.*

*aghı¯r*, in *al-Mant. iq ‘inda al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯*, ed. R.

al-‘Ajam, vol. II, 68; cf. A. I. Sabra, review of N. Rescher’s *Al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯’s*

*Short Commentary on Aristotle’s Prior Analytics*, in *Journal of the*

*American Oriental Society*, 85 (1965), 241–3, at 242a.

18 Lameer [175], chs. 6, 7, and 8.

19 *Al-Mustas. f ¯ a min ‘ilm al-us.*

*u¯ l* (Cairo: 1938). I tend to think the legal

use of logic was the most important factor in its acceptance, although

other factors are cited (e.g., by Ibn Khaldu¯ n) like the theological use of

logic.

20 I. Goldziher, “The Attitude of Orthodox Islam toward the ‘Ancient

Sciences’,” in M. Swartz (ed. and trans.), *Studies on Islam* (Oxford:

1981), 185–215, at 205–6.

21 W. B. Hallaq, *Ibn Taymiyyaagainst the Greek Logicians* (Oxford: 1993),

141.

22 Cf. Bochenski, *History*, 159–62. It is worth noting that – to the best

of my knowledge – there was no treatment in the Arabic manuals

paralleling the treatment in the later Latin manuals of obligations and

insolubles, among other things, but one could find parallel treatments

of these topics outside the logic manuals.

23 Avicenna, *al-Isha¯ ra¯ t wa al-tanbı¯ha¯ t*, ed. S. Dunya, 2nd edn. (Cairo:

1971), 374; cf. S. Inati, *Ibn Sina: Remarks and Admonitions*,

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part 1: *logic* (Toronto: 1981), a somewhat problematic translation

which records the Arabic pagination in the margin.

24 *Discourse on theCategorical and Hypothetical Syllogistic,with a Criticismof*

*the Conjunctive Syllogistic of Avicenna*, in *Rasa¯ ’il falsafiyya:*

*Maqa¯ la¯ t fı¯ al-mant. iq wa al-‘ilm al-t.abı¯‘ı¯ li-Abı¯ al-Walı¯d Ibn Rushd*,

ed. J. ‘Alaw¯ı (Casablanca: 1983), 187–207.

25 Black [170], 97ff.

26 A succinct statement of the problem is given in H. Lagerlund, *Modal*

*Syllogistics in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: 2000); see ch. 1 generally, and

esp. 12–14.

27 *A Criticism of Avicenna’s Doctrine of the Conversion of Premises*,

in ‘Alawı¯, *Maqa¯ la¯ t*, 100–5, at 104–5; Averroes defends al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯’s

approach which had been attacked by Avicenna, though al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı came

to the problem from the other direction, by considering the converse

of the contingent proposition, *every human being may or may not be*

*literate*. In fact, matters are much more complicated than I indicate

in the text, because Averroes kept shifting his position on the modal

syllogistic (see Elamrani-Jamal [171]; it is the last attempt by Averroes

that I refer to here). For details of this extremely technical system, see

now Thom [183], ch. 5.

28 Quoted in Lagerlund, *Modal Syllogistics*, 28; I have very slightly modified

the translation.

29 ‘Alawı¯, *Maqa¯ la¯ t*, 181.

30 Avicenna, *al-Shifa¯ ’, al-qiya¯ s*, ed. S. Zayed (Cairo: 1964), 204. For the

full system developed by Avicenna, see now Thom [183], ch. 4.

31 Avicenna, *al-Isha¯ ra¯ t*, 334–5.

32 Avicenna, *al-Shifa¯ ’, al-qiya¯ s*, 209–10; this is the attack against which

Averroes defended al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı.

33 See Lameer [175], 55ff. for the reasons the term“absolute” was adopted.

34 Avicenna, *al-Ish¯ ar ¯ at*, 264–6. *Maws.*

*¯ uf* and *s.*

*ifa* come from the same

Arabic radicals as *was. f¯ı*, the “descriptional.”

35 Al-T. u¯ sı¯, *Sharh. al-Isha¯ ra¯ t*, printed with Avicenna, *al-Isha¯ ra¯ t*, 312.

36 An attempt at characterizing the attitude and practice of post-

Avicennian philosophers is made in Gutas [94].

37 Some suggestions for further reading: aside from the books referred to

in the footnotes, the following are particularly useful. For an introductory

overview that stretches to cover aspects of non-Aristotelian logic,

and which is very helpful for historical context, see the entry *Mantik.*

by R. Arnaldez in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* [16]. For a rapid historical

sketch, overview of the genres of logical writing, and extensive bibliography,

see Gutas [173]. For a longer historical survey, concentrating on

the period 900–1300, see Street [182]. For a treatment of whether logic

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in this tradition is itself a science, see the splendid Sabra [181]. For bibliographical

guidance, the first port of call is Daiber [1], under “logic.”

For the research on the various books of the *Organon* in Arabic, see

the entries on Aristotle’s *Organon* in Arabic in Goulet [20]. For studies

on the most central logician of those writing in Arabic, see Janssens

[95]. For the technical terms used by the logicians, see now esp. the

*Encyclopaedia of Arabic Terminology of Logic*, prepared by Jabre et al.

[174].

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13 Ethical and political philosophy

No one within the tradition of medieval Islamic political philosophy

contests the notion that human beings are political by nature.

Indeed, in a now famous passage of his *Muqaddima*, Ibn Khaldu¯ n

(1332–1406) cites a corollary of that adage – namely, “human social

organization is necessary” – with approval, using it to focus on what

the philosophers mean by “regime” (*siya¯ sa*), especially “political

regime.”1 As contrasted to the way the term is understood by the

jurists and theologians, the philosophers understand the “political

regime” to encompass

what is incumbent upon each of the inhabitants of the social organization

with respect to his soul and moral habits so that they may entirely dispense

with judges. They call the social organization that obtains what is required

“the virtuous city” and the rules observed with respect to that “the political

regime.” They are not intent upon the regime that the inhabitants of the

community set down through statutes for the common interests, for this is

something else. This virtuous city is rare according to them and unlikely to

occur. They speak about it only as a postulate and an assumption.

Two considerations make it probable that Ibn Khaldu¯ n is referring

to al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı (870–950) here. First, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı is cited more frequently

than any other philosopher in the *Muqaddima*. Second, he was well

known as the author of the *Book of the Political Regime* (*Kita¯b*

*al-siya¯ sa al-madaniyya*). Linking ethical training or soulcraft with

the political or statecraft is the hallmark of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s philosophy.

His prowess in directing attention to the political, in making it central

to every investigation, so dominates his writing that he has long

been seen as the founder of political philosophy within the medieval

Islamic tradition.2

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Indeed, setting the political above all else seems so central to

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and those who follow his lead that it may well provide

a measure by which to categorize the numerous thinkers within

the medieval Arabic/Islamic philosophical tradition who have written

on ethics. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s two best-known predecessors, al-Kind¯ı

(d. after 870) and al-R¯az¯ı (864–925), present an ethical teaching voidof

reflection on the political, while his successors – especiallyAvicenna

(980–1037) and Averroes (1126–98) – join with him in linking ethics

and politics. To defend such sweeping claims, we will examine the

ethical teaching of these first two philosophers and what keeps it

from being linked to a political teaching until the advent of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı,

as well as how he so persuasively manages to bring these two pursuits

together, then note the way Avicenna and Averroes preserve

that bond.

al-fa￣ ra￣ bı￣’s predecessors

*Al-Kind¯ı*

Al-Kind¯ı was acclaimed “the philosopher of the Arabs”; renowned

for his excursions into Greek, Persian, and Indian wisdom and for his

detailed knowledge of astronomy; held to be most knowledgeable in

medicine, philosophy, arithmetic, logic, and geometry; supposedly

skilled as a translator and editor of Greek philosophical works; a

sometime tutor and an astrologer in the courts of two caliphs; and

a highly prolific author. Only a few of his works, however, have

anything to do with ethics. And the teaching set forth in them is not

very far-reaching.

In his *Epistle on the Number of Aristotle’s Books and What is*

*Needed to Attain Philosophy* al-Kind¯ı speaks in passing of ethics

and even of Aristotle’s writings on ethics. But he does not investigate

the ethical teaching set forth by Aristotle nor ethics *per se*

except as a kind of appendix to metaphysics.3 The same holds for al-

Kind¯ı’s *Epistle on the Utterances of Socrates*, which consists mainly

of anecdotes about the kind of ascetic moral virtue so often attributed

to Socrates.4 It is only in the *Epistle on the Device for Driving Away*

*Sorrows* that he reflects at any length on ethics or moral virtue.5

In *On the Number of Aristotle’s Books*, al-Kind¯ı argues that

Aristotle’s philosophy offers insufficient guidance for the attainment

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of man’s goal, human virtue. He presents Aristotle’s practical teaching

as depending upon a knowledge of metaphysics, yet evinces doubt

as to whether such knowledge is accessible to human beings. At the

same time, he characterizes the only other science that can claim to

offer such knowledge, divine science, as being beyond the reach of

most human beings and without practical content. Clearly, another

science is needed, perhaps a human one that presupposes neither

metaphysical knowledge nor divine inspiration – one on the order

of the practical reasoning presented in the *Epistle on the Device*

*for Driving Away Sorrows*.

It is very limited in scope, and the devices presented in it for driving

away sorrow are of utter simplicity. Al-Kind¯ı reasons about a

human phenomenon from the perspective of things we all know and

have observed or even experienced. He calls upon that experience

to set forth his teaching about the nature of sorrow. Even when he

urges the reader to consider the activity of the Creator (R-W X.1–15,

AB 22:1–23:4) or to entertain the notion that there is a homeland

beyond earthly existence (R-W XI.53–7 and XIII.17, AB 27:13–17 and

31:12), he does so on the basis of common opinion rather than on

the basis of any divinely revealed texts. And the asceticism he eventually

urges is grounded upon common-sense arguments about true

human needs, not upon an appeal to otherworldly goals.

From the very outset, al-Kind¯ı assigns firm limits to the treatise

and, in closing, restates them. He understands his task as that of

indicating arguments that will combat sorrow, indicate its flaws,

and arm against its pain. Noting that anyone with a virtuous soul

and just moral habits would reject being overcome by vices and seek

protection against their pain and unjust dominion, implying thereby

that sorrow is to be counted among the vices, al-Kind¯ı says simply

that what he has presented here is “sufficient” (R-W Prologue. 6–7

and 3–6, AB 6:7–8 and 3–7). Admitting at the end of the treatise that

he has been somewhat prolix, he excuses himself on the grounds that

the paths to the goal sought here are almost unlimited and insists

that reaching it provides what is sufficient. That goal is identified

as furnishing the admonitions to be erected firmly in the soul as a

model in order to gain security from the calamities of sorrow and

arrive at “the best homeland,” namely, “the lasting abode and the

resting place of the pious” (R-W XIII.19–21 and 16–17, AB 31:14–

32:3 and 31:11–12). Fundamental to the exposition provided here is

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al-Kind¯ı’s exhortation to pay less attention to the things prized by

fellow human beings and to concentrate on what is most important

for a human life directed to something beyond sensual pleasure.

Al-Kind¯ı begins by explaining what sorrow is, his supposition

being that one cannot cure a sickness or ease a pain without knowing

its cause (R-W I.1–2, AB 6:9–10). In his eyes, the answer is quite

simple: “sorrow is a pain of the soul occurring from the loss of things

loved or from having things sought for elude us” (R-W I.2–3, AB6:11–

12). Since it is clear that no one can acquire all the things he seeks

nor avoid losing any of the things he loves, the only way to escape

sorrow is to be free from these attachments. Dependent as we are

upon our habits to attain happiness or avoidmisery, we must school

ourselves to develop the right kind of habits: ones that lead us to

delight in the things we have and to be consoled about those that

elude us. Thus, the cure of the soul consists in slowly ascending

in the acquisition of praiseworthy habits from the minor and easily

acquired to the harder and more significant, while inuring the soul

to patience over things that elude it and consoling it for things lost

(R-W IV.11–19, AB 12:1–10).

The argument up to this point is, nonetheless, more theoretical

than it is practical. Al-Kind¯ı has explained why people become sad

and how they can avoid sorrow by changing their habits and their

perspective on the world. In short, thus far he has set forth no practical

device for driving away sorrow once it arises. He has not done so,

because these changes are simply too radical; they demand too much

of human beings. Moreover, it is far from clear that we can avoid sorrow

while living as normal human beings. This, it would seem, is the

point of the exhortation that closes the theoretical part of the epistle,

namely, that “we ought to strive for a mitigating device to shorten

the termof sorrow.” The devices to follow will keep us frommisery;

they may even allow us happiness insofar as they help us overcome

the effects of sorrow, but not escape the losses that occasion it.

Al-Kind¯ı then enumerates ten devices, but digresses at one point

to relate anecdotes and a parable as well as to reflect upon the way

the Creator provides for the well-being of all creatures. The digression,

especially the allegory of the ship voyage, moves the discussion

to a higher level of analysis by indicating that our sorrows come

from possessions. All of them, not merely the superfluous ones,

threaten to harm us. Our passage through this world of destruction,

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says al-Kind¯ı, is like that of people embarked upon a ship “to a goal,

their own resting place, that they are intent upon” (R-W XI.1–3, AB

23:5–7).

When the ship stops so that the passengers may attend to their

needs, some do so quickly and return to wide, commodious seats.

Others – who also tend quickly to their needs, but pause to gaze upon

the beautiful surrounding sights and enjoy the delightful aromas –

return to narrower, less comfortable seats. Yet others – who tend

to their needs, but collect various objects along the way – find only

cramped seating and are greatly troubled by the objects they have

gathered. Finally, others wander far off from the ship, so immersed

in the surrounding natural beauty and the objects to be collected that

they forget their present need and even the purpose of the voyage. Of

these, those who hear the ship’s captain call and return before it sails,

find terribly uncomfortable quarters. Others wander so far away that

they never hear the captain’s call and, left behind, perish in horrible

ways. Those who return to the ship burdened with objects suffer so,

due to their tight quarters, the stench of their decaying possessions,

and the effort they expend in caring for them, that most become sick

and some die. Only the first two groups arrive safely, though those in

the second group are somewhat ill at ease due to their more narrow

seats.

Noting at the end of the allegory as at the beginning that the voyage

resembles our passage through this world, al-Kind¯ı likens the

passengers who endanger themselves and others by their quest for

possessions to the unjust we encounter along the way (R-W XI.48–9,

AB 27:7–8).6 Conversely, the just must be those who attend to their

needs or business quickly and do not permit themselves to become

burdened with acquisitions or even to be side-tracked into momentary

pleasures. All the passengers are bound for their homeland, but

it is not clear where that is. At one point, al-Kind¯ı claims that we are

going to “the true world” (R-W XI.48, AB 27:7) and at another that

the ship is supposed to bring us to “our true homelands” (R-W XI.54,

AB 27:14). There is no doubt, however, that whether the destination

be one or many, it can be reached only by acquiring the habits that

eschew material possessions. Beyond that, al-Kind¯ı says nothing, nor

does the rest of the epistle shed light on this issue.

The allegory emphasizes the voyage and the conduct of the passengers.

As one who calls to the passengers, the captain may be

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compared to a prophet. Like a prophet, he calls only once. Those

who do not heed the call are left to their misery, even to their perdition.

Yet the content of the call is empty: it merely warns about the

imminent departure of the ship. The captain offers no guidance about

what to bring or leave; he merely calls. Perhaps more precision is not

needed. The allegory is presented merely as a likeness of our earthly

voyage.

The goal pursued in this treatise is less that of learning about our

end than learning how to make our way here comfortably. Al-Kind¯ı

has already spoken about the habits we need to acquire to accomplish

this goal, but thus far his advice has seemed unduly ascetic. The allegory

shows that we have nearly complete freedom over the way we

conduct ourselves on our voyage. How we use it determines whether

we reach our goal comfortably or suffer throughout the voyage and

perhaps perish. To voyage without troubling ourselves or others, we

must be almost insensitive to our surroundings.

In this sense, the *Epistle on the Device for Driving Away Sorrows*

confirms al-Kind¯ı’s teaching about human virtue in the*Onthe Number*

*of Aristotle’s Books*. As long as we know of no purpose for human

existence, virtue – above all, moral virtue – must be our goal. The

virtue praised here comes closest to moderation, but is also similar

to courage. And in pointing to the way others commit injustice by

amassing possessions, al-Kind¯ı alerts us – albeit in a limited way –

to the requisites of justice.

The primary lesson is that these kinds of virtuous habits provide

comfort during our earthly voyage and preserve us so that we

may eventually arrive at the true world and our homeland, wherever

it may be. Apart from pointing to our lack of wisdom as a

problem, the epistle tells us nothing about that most important

virtue. Nor does al-Kind¯ı make any attempt here to tell us how

we can act to improve our condition and that of those around us.

His teaching provides strategies for coping, especially with personal

loss, and accepts the milieu in which we live as a fixed variable –

that is, as something not worth trying to alter. We learn to put

up with it, even to come to terms with it in such a way that we

improve our own life. At best, al-Kind¯ı offers here a muted call

for citizen education – teaching others the importance of making

their possessions fewer – but he sets forth no broader political

teaching.7

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*Al-Ra¯ zı¯*

Abu¯ Bakr al-Ra¯zı¯ was mainly a physician and teacher of medicine,

but he also served as a sometime advisor to various rulers and was

a prolific author. Indeed, his writings included over 200 books, treatises,

and pamphlets. Thoughhiswriting apparently led to a paralysis

of the hand and impaired eyesight, he nonetheless continued writing

with the help of secretaries and scribes.8

It is difficult to form an appreciation of al-R¯az¯ı’s ethical teaching

because so few of his writings have come down to us and

because the major source for our knowledge of what he believed

is an account his arch-enemy, the Isma¯ ‘ı¯lı¯ missionary Abu¯ H. a¯ tim

al-R¯az¯ı, presented of their different positions. Fortunately, we do

have an important work al-R¯az¯ı wrote late in his life, the *Book of*

*the Philosophic Life*.9 In it, seeking to justify his conduct against

contradictory criticisms leveled against him by unnamed individuals

he describes as “people of speculation, discernment, and attainment,”

he reflects on the importance of devoting oneself to philosophy

and to the significance of taking Socrates as a model for

such a way of life. His critics accuse al-R¯az¯ı of turning away from

the life of philosophy because he socializes with others and busies

himself with acquiring money, activities shunned by the Socrates

known to them, but also blame the ascetic life of Socrates for its evil

practical consequences. In other words, al-R¯az¯ı is as wrong to have

turned away from Socrates as he was to have followed himin the first

place.

Al-R¯az¯ı answers these charges and provides insight into his fuller

teaching without ever exploring why Socrates made his famous conversion,

that is, changed from a youthful asceticism to a mature

involvement in all too human activities. Even though he could

present the turn as evidence that Socrates also deemed it wrong, al-

R¯az¯ı treats Socrates’ asceticism as merely a zealous excess of youth

(sects. 4–29, 99:14–108:12). Since Socrates abandoned it early on, he

sees no need to consider whether a life so devoted to the pursuit of

wisdom that it ignores all other concerns is laudable or whether the

good life is the balanced one he describes as his own at the end of the

treatise. Al-R¯az¯ı refrains from blaming Socrates for his ascetic practices

because they led to no dire consequences. He sees no reason to

blame asceticism simply.

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Still, the issue cannot be ignored, for it points to the broader question

of whether the pursuit of philosophy must be so single-minded

that it takes no account of the needs of men or, differently stated,

whether the proper focus of philosophy is nature and the universe

or human and political things. Al-R¯az¯ı does not immediately distinguish

between the two, for he identifies practicing justice, controlling

the passions, and seeking knowledge as characteristic of the pursuit

of philosophy and praiseworthy in Socrates’ life. By emphasizing

that Socrates abandoned asceticism so as to participate in activities

conducive to human well-being, al-R¯az¯ı avoids examining whether

it is wrong *per se* or against nature. He judges it instead in terms of

its results – in quantitative terms, rather than in qualitative ones –

and deems it wrong only when following it threatens the well-being

of the ascetic or of the human race. Such a tactic also allows al-R¯az¯ı

to avoid having his critics impugn him for being sated with desires

just because he does not imitate Socrates’ earlier asceticism.

The point is eminently sensible, but al-R¯az¯ı weakens it by contending

that however much he may fall short of Socrates’ early asceticism

(a position he has now made defensible), he is still philosophical

if compared to non-philosophic people. He would have been on more

solid ground had he acknowledged that asceticism is always a threat

to the world we live in and then praised the salubrious consequences

of the life of the reformed Socrates. By phrasing his defense in quantitative

terms, he fails to give an adequate account of the balanced life.

What al-R¯az¯ı needed to do was show that Socrates’ earlier asceticism

kept him from pursuing philosophy fully insofar as it prevented him

from paying attention to the questions related to human conduct.

He does not because it would take him away from his major goal:

setting forth the argument that completes his depiction of the philosophic

life. It in turn depends upon his full teaching, and he offers a

summary of it by listing six principles, all taken from other works

(sects. 9–10, 101:5–102:5). Nonetheless, he develops only two in the

sequel. One, phrased almost as an imperative, asserts that pleasure is

to be pursued only in a manner that brings on no greater pain (sects.

11–14, 102:6–103:13), and the other insists upon the way the divinity

has provided for all creatures (sects. 15–22, 103:14–106:6).

This latter principle necessarily obliges humans not to harmother

creatures. In his elaboration of this principle, al-R¯az¯ı leads the reader

to issues of political importance: the natural hierarchy between the

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different parts of the body and between the various species, then a

presumed hierarchy among individuals within the human species.

Such distinctions allow him to formulate a provisional definition

of morality, something he calls the upper and lower limits (sects.

23–8, 106:7–108:3). Briefly, accepting differences in birth and habit

as fixed and as necessarily leading to different pursuits of pleasure,

al-R¯az¯ı urges that one not go against justice or intellect (understood

naturally and according to revelation) on the one hand nor come to

personal harm or excessive indulgence in pleasure on the other. The

point is that since some people can afford more ease than others, the

rule must be flexible. Though he urges that less is nonetheless generally

better, the disparities caused by differences in fortune provoke

him to no suggestions about the need to strive for a more equitable

distribution of wealth or to regulate the way it is passed on. Completely

eschewing such excursions into politics and political economy,

al-R¯az¯ı notes merely that the less wealthy may have an easier

time of abiding by the lower limit and that it is preferable to lean

more toward that limit.

All of this is captured in what al-R¯az¯ı calls the sum of the philosophic

life, “making oneself similar to God . . . to the extent possible

for a human being” (sect. 29, 108:4–12). This summary statement is

extraordinarily subtle and inventive. It consists of four basic parts.

Al-R¯az¯ı begins by asserting certain qualities of the Creator. He then

seeks a rule of conduct based on an analogy between the way servants

seek to please their sovereigns or owners and the way we should

please our Sovereign Master. Next he draws a conclusion from that

analogy about the character of philosophy. And he ends with the declaration

that the fuller explanation of this summary statement is to

be found in his *Book of Spiritual Medicine*.10

The interested reader must turn to it, al-R¯az¯ı says, because it sets

forth (a) how we can rid ourselves of bad moral habits and (b) the

extent to which someone aspiring to be philosophic may be concerned

with gaining a livelihood, acquisition, expenditure, and seeking

rulership. In other words, the definition of the philosophic life

set forth here raises questions that al-R¯az¯ı identifies there as relating

to moral virtue, especially moral purification, and human affairs –

economics as well as political rule. Insofar as philosophy may be

defined as seeking knowledge, struggling to act justly, and being

compassionate as well as kindly, it does encompass matters falling

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under moral virtue or ethics, household management or economics,

and political rule. Allusion to the *Book of Spiritual Medicine* only

underlines what has already been made clear by al-R¯az¯ı’s introduction

of the two principles from his larger teaching. As he notes almost

in passing, confident that the reader discerns how divine providence

for all creatures warrants some serving others, it is perfectly justifiable

to distinguish between human beings in terms of how essential

they are to the well-being of the community.

While allowing al-R¯az¯ı to defend himself against his nameless critics,

such reflections go beyond mere exculpation to an explanation of

philosophy itself (sects. 30–7, 108:13–110:15). Thus, in the concluding

words of this treatise, as part of his final self-justification, he

asserts that philosophy consists of two parts, knowledge and practice,

and that anyone who fails to achieve both cannot be called a

philosopher. His own role as a philosopher is vouchsafed: his writings

testify to his knowledge, and his adherence to the upper and

lower limits proves his practice (sects. 38–40, 110:16–111:7). Yet he

clearly prizes knowledge more and subordinates practice, especially

political practice, to it in both of these ethical writings.

al-fa￣ ra￣ bı￣’s moral and political teaching

Widely referred to as “the second teacher,” that is, second after Aristotle,

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı is renowned as much for his teaching as for thosewith

whom he studied – logic with Yuh. ann¯a ibnH.

ayl¯an, Arabic with Ibn

al-Sarra¯ j, and philosophy with Abu¯ Bishr Matta¯ ibn Yu¯ nus – and his

travels: he is known to have sojourned in Bukh¯ar¯ a, Marv, Baghdad,

Damascus, and Cairo. There is also some speculation, albeit now

contested, that he spent time in Byzantium. His writings, extraordinary

in their breadth and deep learning, extend through all of the

sciences and embrace every part of philosophy. He wrote numerous

commentaries on Aristotle’s logical treatises, was knowledgeable

about the Stagirite’s physical writings, and is credited with an

extensive commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* that is no longer

extant. In addition to writing accounts of Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophy

prefaced by his own adaptation of it to the challenges posed

by Islam in the *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, he composed a

commentary on Plato’s *Laws*.

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Of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s many works that illuminate his ethical and political

teaching, *Selected Aphorisms* (*Fus.*

*u¯ l muntaza‘a*) reveals most

clearly how he looks to Plato and Aristotle, the ancients, for guidance

in practical and theoretical philosophy. Indeed, in the subtitle

he declares his reliance upon them and then goes on in the work

itself to weave together in a most novel manner key themes from

Plato’s *Republic* and Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. The goal of

the work, as described in the subtitle, is to set forth:

Selected aphorisms that comprise the roots of many of the sayings of the

ancients concerning that by which cities ought to be governed and made

prosperous, the ways of life of their inhabitants improved, and they be led

toward happiness.11

The emphasis here is on the partial character of the treatise: it contains

selected aphorisms that encompass the foundations, principles,

or grounds of several – that is, not all – of the sayings of the ancients.

In the ninety-six aphorisms comprising the work (four contested

aphorisms found only in the most recent and least reliable of the six

manuscripts are best ignored), al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı begins with, then develops,

a comparison between the health of the soul, and that of the body.

Quite abruptly, he starts his exposition by defining the health of each

and then explains how the health of the more important of the two –

that of the soul – may be obtained and its sickness repulsed. The first

word of the *Selected Aphorisms* is simply “soul,” while the last is

“virtue.”

As he moves from “soul” to “virtue,” al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı first enters upon

a detailed examination of the soul, then provides an account and

justification of the well-ordered political regime it needs to attain

perfection. At no point does he speak of prophecy or of the prophet

or legislator. He is equally silent about the philosopher and mentions

“philosophy” only two times, both in the antepenultimate aphorism

(94) – the same one in which he mentions, for the only time, “revelation.”

On the other hand, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı speaks constantly throughout

these aphorisms of the statesman (*madan¯ı*) and of the king.

Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı calls upon the ancients in this work to identify the political

order that will achieve human happiness. The individual who

succeeds in understanding how a political community can be well

ordered – whether a statesman or king – will do for the citizens what

the physician does for individual sick persons andwill accomplish for

the citizens who follow his rules what the prophet accomplishes for

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those who follow his. Nonetheless, to attain such an understanding,

one must first be fully acquainted with the soul as well as with political

life. More precisely, the virtuous political regime is the one in

which the souls of all the inhabitants are as healthy as possible: “the

one who cures souls is the statesman, and he is also called the king”

(4).

This is why such a patently political treatise contains two long discussions

of the soul – one, very similar to the *Nicomachean Ethics*,

explains all the faculties of the soul except for the theoretical part of

the rational faculty (6–21), while the other analyzes this theoretical

part and its companion, the practical part, by discussing the intellectual

virtues (33–56) – as well as an investigation of the sound and

erroneous opinions with respect to the principles of being and to

happiness (68–87). These three groups of aphorisms constitute a little

less than two-thirds of the treatise. Void of formal structure or

divisions, the treatise unfolds in such a manner that each moral discussion

is preceded and followed by other groups of aphorisms that

go more deeply into its political teaching. Thus, the discussion of the

soul in general is preceded by a series of analogies between the soul

and the body as well as between the soul and the body politic (1–5),

and is followed first by a discussion devoted to domestic political

economy (22–9) and then by an inquiry into the king in truth (30–2).

The second discussion of the soul, preceded by these three aphorisms,

is followed by an inquiry into the virtuous city (57–67). This

in turn precedes the investigation of sound and erroneous opinions,

itself followed by the account of the virtuous regime (88–96). Subsequent

to each moral digression, the tone of the discussion seems

to become more elevated, almost as though the moral teaching were

the driving force for the political teaching of the treatise or were at

least giving it direction.

In the analogies that open the treatise, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı not only compares

the body to the soul as though it were better known than the body,

but goes further and boldly defines what constitutes the health and

sickness of each. The health of the soul consists in its traits being

such that it can always do what is good and fine as well as carry

out noble actions, whereas its sickness is for its traits to be such

that it always does what is evil and wicked as well as carry out base

actions. The description of the health and sickness of the body is

nearly identical to that of the soul’s, with one important difference:

the body is presented as doing nothing without first having been

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activated by the soul. Then, after the good traits of the soul have been

denoted as virtues and the bad traits as vices (2), al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı abandons

this analogy.

His juxtaposition of the physician to the statesman or king insofar

as the first cures bodies and the second cures souls obliges al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı

to move beyond the individual level. He defines the health of the

body as the “equilibrium of its temperament,” as distinct from the

health of the city, defined as the “equilibrium of the moral habits

of its people.” The change thus introduced is by no means insignificant:

whereas the focus of bodily health is always the individual

body, so that the physician is concerned with individuals as such,

the statesman or king aims at the equilibrium of the city and is concerned

with the totality or at least the plurality of its inhabitants –

notwith each one as an individual. If the statesman or king can arrive

at his ends only by establishing (or re-establishing) an equilibrium in

the moral habits of all the inhabitants, so much the better for them.

But al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı no longer speaks explicitly of individuals. Henceforth,

he speaks more readily of the community – of the city – and rarely

evokes the image of the individual soul. Here, too, he emphasizes

the moral habits of the people of the city as compared to the temperament

of the individual body. The effect is to underline the greater

importance attaching to the statesman/king and his art than to the

physician and his art. After all, it is the statesman or king who determines

how the healthy body will be employed in the city. It falls

not to the physician, but to the statesman or king, to prescribe what

actions the healthy citizen, sound of body as well as of soul, ought

to carry out.

Differently stated, another consideration that distinguishes the

statesman/king from the physician is moral purpose. The physician’s

task is merely to heal, without asking how restored strength or

improved sight will be used, whereas his counterpart must reflect

upon how the benefits of the civic or kingly art will affect the persons

to whom it is applied – how their souls may be healed so that

they carry out actions of service to the city. In this sense, the relationship

between “the art of kingship and of the city with respect

to the rest of the arts in cities is that of the master builder with

respect to the builders” and “the rest of the arts in cities are carried

out and practiced only so as to complete by means of them

the purpose of the political art and the art of kingship” (4). Because

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the greater complexity of this art vouchsafes its greater importance,

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı can insist that such an individual needs to be cognizant of

“the traits of the soul by which a human does good things and how

many they are” as well as of “the devices to settle these traits in the

souls of the citizens and of the way of governing so as to preserve

these traits among them so that they do not cease” (5).

Again, this manner of beginning his discussion of “the science of

morals” permits al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı not only to associate it with politics, but

also to subordinate the moral part of the soul to the intellectual part –

in effect, the statesman/king discerns how to legislate for the city by

means of the intellectual part (see 32, 34–9, 41–5, and 52–3) – and

then to establish a hierarchy among the moral habits themselves.

The latter belong to the appetitive part of the soul and comprise

moderation, courage, liberality, and justice (8). With the exception

of justice, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı says little of these virtues. (Though justice is

investigated at some length in aphorisms 61–6 and just war considered

in aphorism 67, one cannot fail to notice how this enumeration

of the moral virtues confuses the teaching of the ancients in that

Aristotle’s generosity takes the place of Plato’s wisdom as one of the

four cardinal virtues.)

By the end of aphorism 21, that is, by the end of the first extensive

discussion of the soul, all of the moral virtues except for justice have

been discussed in some detail: al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı has explained what these

habits are qua balanced traits of the soul and indicated how to bring

them about. (It is not completely accurate to say that justice has been

totally neglected in this account, for in aphorism 26 he indicates how

the statesman/king must seek the health of each part of the citywith

an eye to the way its health or sickness affects the whole city, just

as the physician must look to the health of the whole body when

treating a particular limb or organ.) As this section closes, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı

seems to restate the parallel between the physician and the statesman/

king, but does so by introducing a new term: instead of talking

about the statesman (*al-madan¯ı*), he now speaks of the “governor of

cities” (*mudabbir al-mudun*). The change in terminology is minor,

but it permits or calls for a new inquiry, one that explains the groupings

formed by human beings. As he explains in aphorism 23, the

way people live – ephemeral as such matters are – influences their

characters. More important than these accidental matters, however,

is what cities aim at, the common goal pursued by their citizens.

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Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s consideration of this problem leads him tomake distinctions

that elevate the tone of the discussion and, above all, to introduce

happiness – even ultimate happiness – into the discussion for

the first time. Now, then, we need to distinguish between different

kinds of rulers; we need to know who truly deserves to be called a

king, and that brings us to the fourth section of the treatise. Thus,

when we do learn what characterizes this individual, it becomes

evident that we need to understand better how he has come to discern

human happiness. Differently stated, we need to learn about

the intellectual virtues: wisdom and prudence.

Although it is not possible here to follow al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı step by step

through the rest of the treatise, it should now be clear how he successfully

fuses statecraft with soulcraft, that is, how his ethical teaching

leads necessarily to his political teaching. It should also be clear

that both the ethical and political teaching draws upon Plato and

Aristotle, even as both adjust them ever so subtly.

al-fa￣ ra￣ bı￣’s successors

*Avicenna*

Of all the medieval Islamicphilosophers, we are best acquaintedwith

the life of Avicenna thanks to the efforts of his devoted pupil and

long-time companion, al-Juzj ¯an¯ı, who preserved something resembling

an autobiography along with his own biographical appendix.12

We learn from it that Avicenna was an assiduous and devoted learner

from the days of his youth to his death. Nowhere is this dedication to

learning more evident than in his massive encyclopedic work, *The*

*Healing* (*al-Shifa¯ ’*).

In the first chapter of the introductory volume to its logical part,

Avicenna explains the general order of the whole work. After the part

on logic is another part devoted to natural science. It is followed by a

third part that sets forth mathematics, and the whole compendium

concludes with Avicenna’s explanation of the divisions and aspects

of the science pertaining to metaphysics. From this account of its

scope, one might think that Avicenna’s *Healing* was devoted solely

to theoretical philosophy or science, that it had nothing to say about

practical philosophy or science. Indeed, not until the very end of his

discussion of metaphysics does he speak of the practical sciences or

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arts of ethics and politics. As he puts it, this “summary of the science

of ethics and of politics” is placed there “until I compose a separate,

comprehensive book about them.”13

Avicenna’s fuller teaching reveals, however, that ethical and political

science belong after divine science intrinsically and not provisionally.

Indeed, they are the human manifestation of divine

science – its practical proof. They testify to divine providence for

humankind and thus to the truth of revelation more clearly than

any of the other sciences investigated in the *Healing*. Yet because the

correctness of what they teach can also be verified by Aristotelian or

pagan reasoning processes, Avicenna must elucidate the relationship

he discerns between pagan philosophy and the revelation accorded

the Prophet Muh.ammad.

Avicenna’s description of Plato’s *Laws* as a treatise on prophecy

provides a clue to how interrelated he deems philosophy and

revelation.14 Similarly, the attention he gives to the political aspects

of prophecy and divine law in the *Healing* leads to reflection upon

the most fundamental political questions: the nature of law, the purpose

of political community, the need for sound moral life among the

citizens, the importance of providing for divorce as well as for marriage,

the conditions for just war, the considerations that lie behind

penal laws, and the end of human life.15 Avicenna’s political teaching

here provides an introduction to the fundamentals of political

science and alerts readers to the need to think carefully about the

strong affinity between the vision of political life set forth by the

pagan Greek philosophers and that exceptional individual who surpasses

philosophic virtue by acquiring prophetic qualities.

*Averroes*

Averroes was an accomplished commentator on Plato and Aristotle,

physician, practicing judge, jurist, princely advisor, and spokesman

for theoretical and practical problems of his day.His profound accomplishments

in jurisprudence, medicine, poetry, philosophy, natural

science, and theology were recognized by fellow Muslims as well

as by the Jews and Christians who first translated his writings into

Hebrew and Latin, but he was known above all for his commentaries

on Aristotle – commentaries that range across the whole of

Aristotle’s corpus. He also wrote a commentary on Plato’s *Republic*,

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this ostensibly because Aristotle’s *Politics* was unknown to the

Arabs. Moreover, he composed treatises on topics of more immediate

concern to fellow Muslims: the *Decisive Treatise* on the relationship

between philosophy and the divine law and the *Incoherence*

*of the Incoherence*, an extensive reply to al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s attacks upon

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and Avicenna.

In these works, Averroes forcefully pleads that philosophy serves

religious and political well-being. It is ever the friend of religion,

seeking to discover the same truth as religion and to bring the learned

to respect divine revelation. Though persuaded that science andwith

it philosophy had been completed by Aristotle, Averroes thought

philosophy still needed to be recovered and protected in each age. To

these goals he addresses himself in all of his works: the commentaries

on Aristotle and Plato are intended to recover or rediscover

the ancient teaching and explain it to those who can profit from it,

while the publicwritings, written to address issues of the day, seek to

preserve the possibility of philosophical pursuits in an increasingly

hostile religious environment.

From Averroes’ *Commentary on Plato’s Republic* we learn, above

all, that the simply best regime is one in which the natural order

among the virtues and practical arts is respected.16 The practical

arts and the moral virtues exist for the sake of the deliberative

virtues, and – whatever the hierarchical relationship between the

practical arts and the moral virtues – all of these exist for the sake of

the theoretical virtues. Only when this natural order is reflected in

the organization and administration of the regime can there be any

assurance that all of the virtues and practical arts will function as

they ought. In order to have sound practice, then, it is necessary to

understand the principles on which such practice depends: the order

and the interrelationship among the parts of the human soul. He

reaches the same conclusion, albeit much more rapidly, by identifying

the best regime in his *Middle Commentary on the “Rhetoric”*

as the city whose opinions and actions are in accordance with what

the theoretical sciences prescribe.

These principles permit Averroes to identify the flaws in the

regimes he sees around him more clearly. They are faulted either

because they aim at the wrong kind of end or because they fail to

respect any order among the human virtues. Thus he blames democracy

for the emphasis it places on the private and for its inability

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to order the desires of the citizens. In his *Commentary on Plato’s*

*“Republic,”* he first emphasizes the need to foster greater concern

for the public sphere and to diminish the appeal of the private,

then explains man’s ultimate happiness in order to indicate how

the desires should be properly ordered. A broad vision of the variety

within the human soul and of what is needed for sound political life

leads Averroes to endorse the tactics – and in some respects, the very

principles – of Platonic politics.

The distinctions scholars habitually draw between Plato and Aristotle

are precisely the ones al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı seems to delight in collapsing,

overlooking, or simply obfuscating. Pursuing common goals and

teachings, his Plato and Aristotle differ only in the paths they take

toward them. Above all, they perceive ethical teaching to be first and

foremost a political undertaking. From them, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı learns that

citizen virtue must be the primary concern of the lawgiver. Forming

the character of citizens and helping them to achieve the highest of

human goods – ultimate perfection – is the end at which, following

them, he aims.

Consequently, character formation takes precedence over institutions

and even kinds of rule.Determining who rules is less important

than insuring that the ruler has the qualities – moral and intellectual

– for rulership. And should a single person having the requisite

qualities not happen to be found, rulership passes to two or more –

assuming they come to have those qualities. This sums up what we

learn from al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and from those who, like Averroes as well to a

certain extent as Avicenna, follow in his footsteps.

Or do we? If this is a correct conclusion to draw from what al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı has to say in the *Selected Aphorisms* and related writings, does

it not conflict with what we know about his teaching in yet others?

More important, does it not conflict with what Plato’s Socrates has

to say about the importance of a philosopher having some notion of

the good if he is to rule well and with Aristotle’s emphasis on contemplation

immediately before calling attention to the need for laws

as a means of making good citizens – the one in *Republic*, books VI

and VII, the other at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*? Differently

stated, is not sound theory the basis for sound practice?

The answer to that question separates al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and Averroes

(and, again, Avicenna to a certain extent) from al-Kind¯ı and al-R¯az¯ı.

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Insofar as the latter two subordinate the practical to the theoretical,

their ethical teaching is limited to the individual. Even though it is

far from certain al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and his erstwhile companions succeed in

finding an independent ground for practice, they oblige a thoughtful

reader to travel that road. In doing so, the reader flirtswith becoming

a lawgiver much as did Adeimantus and Glaucon under the spell of

Socrates. That, in the end, is the significance of linking an ethical

teaching with a political one.

notes

1 See Ibn Khaldu¯ n, *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldu¯ n (Prole´gome`nes d’Ebn-*

*Khaldoun): texte arabe, publi ´e d’apr`es les manuscrits de la Biblioth`*

*eque imp´ eriale*, ed. M. Quatrem`ere (Paris: 1858; repr. Beirut: 1970),

2.126:16 and 2.127:1–6. For the citation that follows, see 2.127:6–14; the

translation is my own.

2 See Mahdi [190].

3 These issues are discussed at greater length in C. E. Butterworth,

“Al-Kind¯ı and the Beginnings of Islamic Political Philosophy,” in

Butterworth [187], 11–60, esp. 23–6.

4 See Butterworth, “Al-Kind¯ı and the Beginnings,” 52–6. For anecdotes

and sayings involving Socrates in Arabic, see I. Alon, *Socrates in Mediaeval*

*Arabic Literature* (Leiden: 1991), and I. Alon, *Socrates Arabus*

(Jerusalem: 1995).

5 There are two editions:H.Ritter andR.Walzer, *Uno scritto morale inedito*

*di al-Kindı¯* (Rome: 1938), A. Badawı¯, *Rasa¯ ’il falsafiyya li-al-Kindı¯*

*wa al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯ wa Ibn Ba¯ jja wa Ibn ‘Adı¯* (Beirut: 1980), 6–32. Textual

references are to the sections and lines of the Ritter and Walzer edition

(R-W) by means of Roman and Arabic numerals and to the pages

and lines of Badaw¯ı’s (AB) by means of Arabic numerals alone. For a

recent English translation see G. Jayyusi-Lehn, “The Epistle of Ya‘qu¯ b

ibn Ish. ¯aq al-Kind¯ı on the *Device forDispelling Sorrows*,” *British Journal*

*of Middle Eastern Studies* 29 (2002), 121–35.

6 Both here and in the only other passage about injustice in this treatise

(R-W XXXI:6, AB 6:7), at issue is the trouble undue attachment to

possessions brings upon ourselves and others.

7 For a different reading of this work see further Druart [66].

8 For al-Ra¯zı¯’s works, see al-Ra¯zı¯, *Rasa¯ ’il falsafiyya*, ed. P. Kraus (Cairo:

1939; repr. Beirut: 1973); see further C. E. Butterworth, “The Origins of

al-R¯az¯ı’s Political Philosophy,” *Interpretation* 20 (1993), 237–57; Druart

[209]; M. Rashed, “Abu¯ Bakr al-Ra¯zı¯ et le *kala¯m*,” *MIDEO* 24 (2000),

39–54; P. E.Walker, “The Political Implications of al-R¯az¯ı’sPhilosophy,”

in Butterworth [187], 61–94.

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9 See al-Ra¯zı¯, *Rasa¯ ’il falsafiyya*, 98–111 (with an introduction by Kraus

on 97–8). For an English translation, see C. E. Butterworth, “Al-R¯az¯ı:

The *Book of the Philosophic Life*,” *Interpretation* 20 (1993), 227–36.

Section references here are to my English translation, which is based

on Kraus’ edition.

10 The Arabic text of the *Book of Spiritual Medicine* or *Kita¯b al-t. ibb alru*

*¯ h. a¯nı¯* is in al-Ra¯zı¯, *Rasa¯ ’il falsafiyya*, 15–96. Focused primarily on

how to acquire moral virtue and avoid vice, the last few pages contain

a summary account of the relationship between virtue and political

life; see chs. 1–16, 17.14–80.9 with chs. 18–19, 85.1–92.10. In ch. 17,

80.10–84.16, al-R¯az¯ı explains how to earn a living within the strictures

of the moral teaching already set forth, while in ch. 20, 92.11–96.9, he

investigates why people fear death.

11 For the Arabic text, see Ab ¯ u Nas.r al-F¯ar ¯ab¯ı, *Fus.*

*u¯ l muntaza‘a*, ed. F.M.

Najjar (Beirut: 1971). An English translation may be found in Alfarabi

[185], 1–67. The references here to the aphorisms follow Najjar’s numbering,

reproduced in the translation.

12 Of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s many successors, it is possible here only to focus upon

Avicenna and Averroes. For Ibn B¯ajja and IbnT.

ufayl, see above, chapter

8. Figures later than al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı who wrote on ethics include his student,

Yah.

y¯a ibn ‘Ad¯ı (d. 363/974), and Ibn Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), both

of whom wrote works entitled *Tadhı¯b al-akhla¯q*. See Yah. ya¯ ibn ‘Adı¯,

*The Reformation of Morals*, trans. S. H. Griffith (Provo: 2003), and

Miskawayh, *Tadhı¯b al-akhla¯q*, ed. C. Zurayk (Beirut: 1966). For an

English version of the latter see Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character*,

trans. C. Zurayk (Beirut: 1968). See further R. Walzer, “Aspects

of Miskawayh’s *Tadhı¯b al-akhla¯q*,” in *Studi orientalistici in onore di*

*Giorgio Levi della Vida*, vol. II (Rome: 1956), 603–21, repr. in Walzer

[45], 220–35. On Ibn Miskawayh generally see M. Arkoun, *Contribution*

*a` l’e´ tude de l’humanisme arabe au IVe/Xe sie`cle: Miskawayh,*

*philosophe et historien* (Paris: 1970; 2nd edn. Paris: 1982).

13 See Avicenna, *Kita¯b al-shifa¯ ’: al-mant. iq, al-madkhal*, ed. G. Anawati,

M. El-Khodeiri, and F. El-Ahwani (Cairo: 1952), 11.12–13; see also

11.1–11.

14 See Avicenna, *Fı¯ aqsa¯m al-‘ulu¯m al-‘aqliyya* (*On the Divisions of*

*the Intellectual Sciences*) in *Tis’ rasa¯ ’il* (*Nine Treatises*) (Cairo: 1908),

108.1–3.

15 See Avicenna, *Kita¯b al-shifa¯ ’: al-ila¯hiyya¯ t*, ed.G. Anawati and S. Zayid

(Cairo: 1960), bk. 10, chs. 2–5, 441.1–455.16. For an English translation,

see M. Marmura, “Avicenna, *Healing*: *Metaphysics* X,” in Lerner and

Mahdi [189], 98–111.

16 For what follows, see Averroes [186] and also C. E. Butterworth, *Philosophy,*

*Ethics, and Virtuous Rule: A Study of Averroes’ Commentary*

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*on Plato’s “Republic”*, Cairo Papers in Social Science, vol. IX, Monograph

1 (Cairo: 1986). Unfortunately, Averroes’ *Middle Commentary*

*on Aristotle’s “Nicomachean Ethics”* has survived only in independent

Hebrew and Latin translations; see Averroes, *Middle Commentary on*

*Aristotle’s “Nicomachean Ethics” in the Hebrew Version of Samuel*

*Ben Judah*, ed. L. V. Berman (Jerusalem: 1999) and Averroes, *In Libros*

*Decem MoraliumNicomachiorumExpositio*, in *Aristotelis Operacum*

*Averrois Commentariis* (Venice: 1552; repr. Frankfurt a. M.: 1962),

vol. III. A splendid edition and French translation of the *Middle Commentary*

*on Aristotle’s Rhetoric* has just appeared; see *Averro`es (Ibn*

*Rushd)*, *Commentaire moyen a` la “Rhe´ torique” d’Aristote: e´dition*

*critique du texte arabe et traduction franc¸aise*, ed. and trans.M. Aouad,

3 vols. (Paris: 2002).

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14 Natural philosophy

Natural philosophy, or physics, occupies an ambiguous position in

the encyclopedia of ancient learning. It is primarily an ontology of the

sensible world, and is thus inseparable from metaphysics. Aristotle’s

physical inquiries, for example, can only be understood in the light

of the discussions of substance, potentiality, unity, and the Prime

Mover that we find in his *Metaphysics*. But natural philosophy is

not *only* an ontology of the sensible world. It does not aim solely at

explaining what wemight call the “semantics” of the sensible world.

It also tries, in some cases, to set up “syntactic” rules that allow us

to describe a given idealized category of phenomena. The contrast

between ontology and mathematical physics is an example. But as

we shall shortly see, the “syntax” need not be mathematical.

In classical Islam, there was a multiplicity of physical theories.

We may mention, among others, the atomism of the “rational theologians”

(*mutakallimu¯ n*), Avicennian neo-Aristotelianism, Averroist

“orthodox” Aristotelianism, and the infinitesimalism of some

geometers. Does that mean that any effort to distinguish unitary

features of a *single* natural philosophy is doomed to fail? On the

contrary, although there was a multiplicity of schools, the physical

debate was nonetheless focused on certain fundamental problems.

This means not only that certain questions were recognized as particularly

significant by all the schools, but also that the answers proposed

to them proceeded from some basic intuitions that were held

in common. These shared intuitions may thus be viewed as typical

of the classical period, even if points of disagreement were more evident

to those embroiled in the controversy. This relative coherence

across disputing schools is not best understood merely by determining

“who influenced whom.” Rather, we should direct our attention

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to the intrinsic necessity, felt by many Islamic thinkers, of revisiting

two fundamental (and connected) topics of Aristotelian physics:

the status of the *minima* and the distinction between actuality and

potentiality.

the beginnings: the debate between abu￣

al-hudhayl and al-naz.z.

a￣m (ca. 830 c.e.)

The beginnings of reflection on physics in Islam are obscure. We

know nothing much of relevant discussions, if any, before the

‘Abb¯asid period, and even our knowledge of the ninth century relies

nearly exclusively on later doxographies.1 The works of the two

Basrian theologians Ab ¯ u al-Hudhayl and al-Naz.z.

¯am are no exception.

But their controversy over the question of the continuum and

infinity may be taken as marking the birth of a whole tradition of

physics in Islam.2

According to the doxographers, Abu¯ al-Hudhayl posited “atoms”

or, in his terminology, “indivisible parts” (*al-ajza¯ ’ allatı¯ la¯*

*tatajazza’*). He took them to be:

(1) non-corporeal (rather than incorporeal)

(2) without extension

(3) indiscernible from one another.

The first criterion, unlike the other two, is terminological: indivisibles

are not bodies, because they are the *constituents* of bodies.

Criteria (2) and (3) are more significant. Abu¯ al-Hudhayl has, so to

speak, an “abstract” conception of the indivisibles, different from

the corpuscular theories of the ancient atomists and the alchemists

of his own day. Indivisible parts are not qualitatively different from

one another; they do not differ even in shape. Local motion consists

in the fact that a body (that is, an assemblage of indivisibles)3

occupies one and then some other position. Indivisibles are separated

by vacuum, and over any given distance the “atomic density”

depends on the width of the intervals of vacuum between the indivisible

parts. These parts are discrete and finite in number. We see

immediately that such considerations are not intended to explain

the world in the way that modern physics does: they hold only at

a theoretical (ontological) level. Thus Abu¯ al-Hudhayl never suggests

that the thresholds implied by the theory (the length of the

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maximumpossible intervalwith no atoms in it, the maximumnumber

of atoms in a given length, etc.) could actually be determined, i.e.,

measured.

Al-Naz.z.

¯am accepts the rejection of the Aristotelian ontology

implicit in this model, but refuses its finitist bias. More precisely,

he recognizes the validity of premises (1), (2)4, and (3), but remarks

that if, as (2) claims, atoms are deprived of any extension, then *a fortiori*

the same must be true of the positions occupied by something

moving during its transit. Therefore, the puzzle of how a motion can

traverse an infinite number of points cannot be resolved by saying

that there is a finite number of material points between the starting

point and end point of the motion. There must be an infinite number

of indivisible positions on any given stretch AB. And since nothing

can move through an infinite number of positions during a finite

time, we have to admit that the moving thing “leaps” over some

spaces, so that the distance between A and B can be traversed in a

finite number of leaps. This theory of the “leap” (*t.*

*afra*), for which

al-Naz.z.

¯am was famous, must not be confused with the atomic or

sequential motion of Abu¯ al-Hudhayl, which is more reminiscent of

Greek theories.5 It must be understood as a sort of perpetual miracle

taking place in the sensible world. It is God who, *annihilating and*

*recreating* the moving thing a finite number of times at different

positions of its transit, allows every local motion to succeed.

This debate deeply influenced later thinkers, who accepted its

major premises. The debate does not seem to reflect previous doctrines,

at least not directly, though parallels have been drawn to

Indian atomism,6 with which the Basrian theologians may effectively

have been partially acquainted,7 and to the Epicurean theory of

the *minima*.8 But the differences are more striking than the similarities.

Nobody before Abu¯ al-Hudhayl had so strongly insisted on the

theoretical primacy of motion as opposed to bodily composition, nor

had anyone so firmly maintained the undifferentiated nature of the

indivisible parts. The comparison with Epicureanism, on this question,

is illuminating: the Epicureans found it necessary to distinguish

an atom (the smallest possible body) and its *minima* (the smallest

bodily parts) primarily in order to save their doctrine of matter. But

the *mutakallimu¯ n* tend to assimilate the two, yielding an atomism

of position that is essentially dictated by their conception of local

motion.

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Because – or, from an Aristotelian point of view, in spite – of this

emphasis on the question of motion, Basrian atomism has an obvious

“geometricizing” character. While it seems improbable to suppose

thatAb ¯ u al-Hudhayl and al-Naz.z.

¯am were conscious of the full implications

of this aspect of their theories, it seems nevertheless certain

that both authors had some knowledge of basic geometry. In particular,

they were undoubtedly aware of the Euclidean definition of the

point and the line. We know that Abu¯ al-Hudhayl was acquainted

with Sahl b. Ha¯ ru¯ n,9 who was “director” of the House of Wisdom

in Baghdad and would have had expertise in geometry. It would be

naive to suppose that the similarities between the indivisible parts of

the Basrians and the points of the geometers are mere coincidence.

abu￣ al-hudhayl’s followers (ca. 900–ca.

1050 c.e.)

The later *kala¯m* tradition confirms this close connection. Abu¯ al-

Hudhayl’s school makes clear the similarities between Euclidean

“punctualism” and their master’s atomism. Paradoxically, though,

the *mutakallimu¯ n* of the period from the time of Abu¯ al-Hudhayl

until the contemporaries of Avicenna try to combine their geometrical

atomism with a radical finitism. This gives rise to certain difficulties

for moderns who are trying to understand *kala¯m* atomism.

Around 900 C.E., there were two major schools of Mu‘tazilite

*kala¯m*(the “Basrians” and the “Baghdadians”), going back ultimately

to Abu¯ al-Hudhayl. The apogee of Basrian scholasticism is represented

byAbu¯ ‘Alı¯ al-Jubba¯ ’ı¯ (d. 915–16C.E.) and his sonAbu¯ Ha¯ shim

al-Jubb¯a’¯ı (d. 933) – both of them first-class metaphysicians – whereas

the leading personality of the Baghdadian school is Abu¯ al-Qa¯ sim

al-Balkh¯ı (d. 931). In spite of many points of dispute between the

schools, they basically accept Abu¯ al-Hudhayl’s atomism.10 Even

more interestingly, his geometrical intuition is explicitly recognized

and vindicated: we know from later reports in the *Tadhkira*

of the *mutakallim* Ibn Mattawayh (d. 1076–7) that Abu¯ al-Qa¯ sim

and Abu¯ Ha¯ shim both assimilated the indivisible parts to Euclidean

points.

Of the two mathematical references attributed to Abu¯ al-Qa¯ sim

al-Balkh¯ı by Ibn Mattawayh, the first is a negative refutation of an

opponent’s position, while the other provides positive grounds for his

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own view. This is probably not fortuitous, but expresses the master’s

careful dialectical strategy. Against his opponents who believe that

space and bodies are continua, that is, infinitely divisible, Abu¯ al-

Q¯asimpresents first an argument regarding the cornicular angle: that

is, the angle between a circle and its tangent line.

It is possible that there be an angle narrower than anything, so narrow that it

is impossible to draw two straight lines out of it. According to them[sc. Abu¯

al-Q¯asimand the other atomists], this must invite us to postulate indivisible

parts, because otherwise all angles would have the same property of allowing

us to draw straight lines out of them.11

It is probable that Abu¯ al-Qa¯ sim, even before suggesting an analogy

with what the indivisibles *are*, is criticizing his continuist

adversaries’ use of the lemma of Archimedes (every magnitude, multiplied

a certain number of times, will be greater than every homogeneous

magnitude).12 The point of contention is therefore the question

of *homogeneity*. The atomists believe that any two magnitudes

are homogeneous: every magnitude is a multiple of the smallest possible

magnitude, the minimum. They believe that the case of the

cornicular angle points to the existence of this smallest magnitude:

any rectilinear angle (an angle between two straight lines), no matter

how small, will have a *smaller* cornicular angle inside it. This cornicular

angle (from within which no rectilinear angle can be drawn)

has a magnitude smaller than that of any rectilinear angle. Thus, on

the assumption that all magnitudes are homogeneous, this cornicular

anglewill be a sort of “minimal part” of any rectilinear angle. The

fact that both types of angle are drawn in the unitary domain of *surfaces*

makes this assumption not implausible: any two angles drawn

on the same surface ought to be homogeneous. The continuists, by

contrast, hold that a cornicular angle is not homogeneous to a rectilinear

angle, but only to other cornicular angles. Avicenna provides

a similar refutation in the *Mub¯ ah.*

*atha¯ t*, insisting on the divisibility

of the cornicular angle into smaller cornicular angles.13

Arguing positively, Abu¯ al-Qa¯ sim cites the Euclidean definition

of the point:

Euclid has mentioned in his book that a point has no part and that the

distance from the circle’s center to its circumference is the same in every

direction. But if the part were divisible, there would be an infinite number

of distances.14

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For the first time in the long history of atomism, an atomist appeals

to the Euclidean definition of the point as his authority.15 This

means not only that corpuscularism, as we have seen, is more or

less abandoned in favor of an atomism of position, but also that a

new articulation of “physics” and geometry comes to the fore. For

mathematical realities are no longer *secondary* qualities of the sensible,

that is, properties of the sensible objects only insofar as they

are grasped through imaginative abstraction.16 Now, they become

directly constitutive of the sensible world. The geometrical point

and the indivisible part are not merely analogous: they are identical.

The indivisible is a point that belongs not to an already

abstracted “extension,” but to matter itself. From an Aristotelian

point of view, the paradox is that only our imaginative faculty

enables us to grasp this basic constituent of matter. Without entering

into details, it is worth noting that such a doctrine entails a

re-evaluation of the epistemic status of imagination, which, far from

being tied only to *abstracta*, becomes our primary access to *reality*.

Arabic Peripatetics thus persistently criticized what they saw

as the excessive role that imagination played in the ontology of the

*mutakallimu¯ n*.17

A third passage, less explicit but in a sense even more interesting,

appears in the same chapter of Ibn Mattawayh. Surprisingly – and

we shall very shortly indicate the polemical charge of the unusual

interpretation – the author mentions Aristotle himself as a defender

of the indivisibles:

Aristotle has mentioned in his treatise *On the Heavens and the World* that

the line can be divided in length but not inwidth, that surface can be divided

in both directions and that the body can be divided in three directions. It

has also been said that according to him and others, the line has only one

dimension, the surface two, and the body three.18

Ibn Mattawayh alludes here to the first chapter of Aristotle’s *De*

*Caelo* (I.1, 268a7–8 = *al-Sama¯ ’ wa al-‘a¯ lam*, ed. Badawı¯ 126.1–3):

“magnitude divisible in one direction is a line, in two directions a

surface, in three directions a body.” It cannot have escaped the author

whose argument Ibn Mattawayh is reporting that Aristotle, in the

lines immediately preceding, in fact asserted the infinite divisibility

of every magnitude (*De Caelo*, I.1, 268a6–7 = Badaw¯ı 125.9–126.1):

“the continuous may be defined as that which is divisible into parts

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that are themselves divisible to infinity, body as that which is divisible

in all ways.” It is probable then that Ibn Mattawayh’s source

tries to take Aristotle at his own word: if we can distinguish the line

from the surface, it is because the “second dimension” (the “width”)

of the line is a *minimum*. It is not to be thought of as equivalent to

some extended division of a line perpendicular to the line we have.

But if, on the other hand, this second dimension, which admittedly

is minimal, did not exist at all, it would be impossible to speak of

the very existence of the line:

Thus Abu¯ Ha¯ shim has said that that agrees with what we say about the

[indivisible] part because otherwise, if we did not stop at a limit, it would

be necessary for the line and the surface to be like the body: they would

have dimensions [divisible]without end, and we could not distinguish [lines,

surfaces and bodies] from one another.19

Since Abu¯ Ha¯ shim dedicated an entire volume to a critical examination

(*tas.affuh.* ) of the *De Caelo*, and since this book is quoted

twice in the *Tadhkira* of Ibn Mattawayh, Aristotle’s quotation and

the remark of Abu¯ Ha¯ shim probably go back to this treatise.20 Abu¯

H¯ashim has polemically combined two of Aristotle’s remarks, the

first one postulating the infinite division of magnitudes, the other

the unidimensionality of the line. If the line is really unidimensional,

it is because there are, “in the heavens and the world” as well as in

Euclidean geometry, some minimal entities. Let us note in passing

that the “Euclidean” overtones of *De Caelo*, I.1 have struck modern

Aristotle scholars as well.21

al-naz.z.

a￣m and tha￣ bit ibn qurra

We have just seen that Abu¯ al-Hudhayl’s successors clarified and

made more explicit the geometricizing intuition present inhis atomism.

By contrast, except for some pupils about whom we know

practically nothing,22 al-Naz.z.

¯am does not seem to have had a wide

posterity. That is not to say that his ideas about infinity were not

an important legacy to natural philosophy. I show elsewhere that his

theory of the “leap” as a solution to the puzzle of actual infinity was

known to Leibniz and reformulated by him in the light of infinitesimal

calculus. Leibniz uses the term“transcreation” (*transcreatio*) to

describe God’s recreation of a moving thing at each new position, and

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attributes a similar idea to some *theologi*, which may be an allusion

to the *mutakallimu¯ n*.23

In the Islamic world, al-Naz.z.

¯am’s doctrine of the “leap” was frequently

criticized by philosophers and theologians, but it undoubtedly

encouraged them to distance themselves from a purely

Aristotelian conception of the distinction between potentiality and

actuality. In particular, we shall see below how Avicenna tries to

introduce more actuality into the traditional conception of the infinite.

Al-Naz.z.

¯am’s infinitism was soon aided by the ideas of infinitesimalist

mathematicians, especially Th¯abit ibn Qurra (d. 288/901).

Th¯abit was responsible for a decisive event in the history of physics:

the conscious combination of a “philosophical” and a “mathematical”

theory of actual infinity. Th¯abit wrote an entire treatise to establish

the validity of actual infinity, but, unlike al-Naz.z.

¯amand Leibniz,

he never appeals to God in order to explain motion from A to B.

A fragment, quoted by Avicenna, can help us to compare Th¯abit’s

doctrine of local motion to al-Naz.z.

¯am’s.24 According to the latter,

the soul, which is a “subtle” (*lat.*

*¯ıf*) body, “leaps” toward its origin

at the moment of death.25 Some transmigrationist disciples of al-

Naz.z.

¯am extended the model, probably claiming that, since the soul

cannot go through the infinite number of points existing between

two bodies A and B, it is obliged to leap over the space between

them.26 Th¯abit, whose treatise on actual infinity begins with an

allusion to the problem of the soul’s transmigration,27 explains that

when the soul leaves the body to rejoin the astral element, it needs

a “subtle body” (*jism lat.*

*¯ıf*) to inhabit during its transit (soul being

the form of the body). This doctrine must be understood in its philosophical

context, against the background of an important passage

of Alexander’s lost commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics*.28 Alexander

alludes here to some Platonists who have introduced a doctrine of the

soul’s vehicle (*ochˆema*) to explain the motion of something without

parts. But Th¯abit’s argument is different. The difficulty, according

to him, is not in supposing that something without parts (a point)

can move, but that the form of a body can persist in the absence

of body. In this departure from al-Naz.z.

¯am and from the philosophical

tradition, Th¯abit’s own conception of motion stands out clearly:

the mobile that is a point (here, the soul) goes through an actually

infinite number of positions in a finite time.

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This fragment is the only allusion to non-heavenly motion that

the tradition has recorded from Th¯abit. But it of course has consequences

beyond the particular case of the *soul*’s motion. It must

be understood in the context of the development of mathematical

theories of motion, attested by numerous sources: astral motion in

the works of Tha¯bit and al-Bı¯ru¯ nı¯,29 the motion of light in a short

treatise of al-Qu¯ hı¯,30 the motion of objects in free fall in the *Optics*

of Ibn al-Haytham,31 etc. All these discussions share an implicit

rejection of the Aristotelian conception of “extended” motion, in

favor of the idea of motion and/or velocity *at an instant*.32 Natural

philosophers could not remain indifferent to this new mathematical

approach to physical reality, as we shall now see.

avicenna’s dynamics

Avicenna’s dynamics are in part an attempt to reassess and reformulate

the Aristotelian distinction between the sublunar and supralunar

world: the world we live in and the world of the heavens.

Avicenna’s success in this project depended on an original articulation

of dynamics and kinematics that, given its deep influence on

generations of Islamic and Latin scholars, may be considered as the

single most important authority of preclassical physics.33 Let us try

to understand better the historical significance of his position. I shall

argue:

(1) that the central problem of Avicenna’s Aristotelian physics

is a distinction between different types of *impetus*;34

(2) that a coherent doctrine of rectilinear (sublunar) impetus

must admit some sort of actual infinity, and that as a consequence

Avicenna reformulated the Aristotelian discussion

of infinity found in book III of the *Physics*.

*The controversy over the “law” of motion*

In order to explainAvicenna’s position in its context, we have first to

say a word about the debate, initiated by Philoponus, over the Aristotelian

“law” of motion. Combining some arguments in Aristotle

(*Physics*, IV.8, VII.5, and *De Caelo*, I.6 in particular) – which originally

have very different purposes35 – Philoponus and his followers

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constructed an Aristotelian “law” of motion. It expresses mean speed

(*S*) as a function of force (*F*, which is weight in the case of free fall)

and the resistance of the medium (*R*):

*S* = *F/R.*

For ontological and empirical reasons, many physicists of antiquity

and the Middle Ages reformulated the relation of the force

and the resistance. Philoponus, in particular, replaces this “law” he

attributes to Aristotle with another one, which does not divide the

force by the resistance but postulates that the time *t* required for an

object to fall a certain distance through a medium will be inversely

proportional to its weight (*W*), plus a certain time (*x*):

*t* = 1*/W*+ *x.*

It is only in the determination of *x* that the density of the medium

plays a role. Thus, the mean speed of a free fall is directly proportional

to the weight of the body, but is also partially influenced by the

density of the medium.

Philoponus was not the only one who tried to reformulate the

Aristotelian “law.” Another attempt, surely known toAvicenna, was

that made by some *mutakallimu¯ n*. We learn from Ibn Mattawayh

that according to Abu¯ Ha¯ shim’s followers, any two bodies (they

use the example of a feather and a stone) would fall in a void with

exactly the same speed.36 This conclusion results from an ontological

consideration (since, as we have seen, the indivisibles are perfectly

identical to one another, the *impetus* of each atom must be identical)

and a physical observation (some bodies around us fall more quickly

than others). It follows that two indivisible parts in free fall, separated

from one another, fall with the same speed. Now suppose they

are joined through the accident of “composition” (*ta’l¯ıf*). The cause

of the fall of each atom considered separately (that is, its “weight”)

is the same. The difference in speed must then be explained by the

fact that the body of lesser atomic density does not cut through the

medium with the same force as the body of higher atomic density.

Hence, we obtain the following law, which anticipates the results of

Benedetti and the young Galileo:

*S* = *c*(*W*− *R*)*/W,*

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where *c* is a constant, *S* the speed,*W*the weight of the body, and *R* the

resistance of the medium. In a void (where *R* = 0), *S* = *c*, whatever

the value of *W*, yielding the above-mentioned result that any two

bodies fall through a void at equal speed, whatever their weight. It

should also be noted that both the weight and the resistance are here

conceived of as “impetus” (*i‘tima¯d*).

*Impetus (*mayl*)*

Avicenna has very precise reasons for rejecting Philoponus’ reading

of Aristotle:37 it neglects a fundamental difference between supralunar

and sublunar motion. Astral motion always displays the same

speed, whereas motion below the heavens is subject to acceleration

and deceleration. But what all the “laws” so far proposed take into

account is at best the mean velocity of the body, and may describe

nothing more than a body’s “abstract” aptitude to move through a

medium. None accounts for acceleration.

But in the sublunar world, one has to distinguish sharply between

the “general” impulsion of a given body towards its natural place

(*mayl*-1), and the “concrete” impulsion of this body at a certain

instant (*mayl*-2). The contrast is between a stone’s invariant tendency

to move downward (*mayl*-1) and its actual acceleration downward

at a given instant (*mayl*-2), which is the *realization* of natural

acceleration. This realization makes it impossible to consider the different

moments of the motion as pure potentialities, like the points

of a line drawn on a sheet of paper. There are only two options: either

we adopt a sequential conception of motion, or we come to terms

with actual infinity.

By the time of Avicenna, the first solution had been put forward

by the *mutakallimu¯ n*. According to them, if we throw a body vertically,

on its way up it might have an impetus (*i‘tima¯d*)38 of intensity

1,000, for example, at the first instant *t0*, 900 at the next instant

*t1*, 800 at *t2*, and so on. It will fall back down when the quantity of

*i‘tima¯d* towards the top imposed by the thrower no longer suffices

to counterbalance its natural *i‘tima¯d* toward the bottom.39 Furthermore,

these discrete unities of dynamic motion will be separated by

minute (and, of course, imperceptible) instants of rest. This last point

is sharply criticized by Avicenna in the *Physics* of the *Shifa¯ ’*:

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According to them[sc. the*mutakallimu¯ n*], it is not impossible that amotion

cease, be followed by a rest, and that a motion then be generated again by

the *i‘tima¯d*. This is most absurd.40

Thus, according to Avicenna, a free-fall motion must display perfect

kinetic continuity *and* a principle of distinction for each point of

its trajectory. Because these points are infinite, and the principle of

distinction will be a certain actuality, it now becomes necessary to

reconsider the question of actual infinity.

*The question of actual infinity*

Avicenna has paid much attention to the question of the infinite.

Even though he followed Aristotle in maintaining the basic distinction

between potential and actual infinity, he refined this distinction

by introducing two subcategories. This allowed himto come to terms

with contemporary developments in the exact sciences and theology.

According to the *locus classicus* on this issue in Aristotle’s *Physics*

(III.5, 206b12–14), the potential infinite includes the infinite by division

(dichotomy) and by addition (counting), whereas the actual infinite

is reduced to the special case of past years and events:

**Potential infinite Actual infinite**

By addition, by division Recurrent events *a parte ante*

This sort of actual infinity can be allowed, because even though an

infinity of years or events may have passed, there is no infinite set of

things all present together. In a sense, such an actual infinite is still

at least partially potential. But a problem arises once we admit the

personal immortality of the soul: the souls of all individual humans

that have lived in the past still exist now, and on the assumption

that the world is eternal, they form an infinite set of substances.

Christian and Muslim Aristotelians must now get to grips with a

real actual infinity.

This is one reason, though surely not the whole reason, for

Avicenna’s introduction of a subtle distinction between two types

of infinite sets. Sets of the first type include in themselves their

own rule of construction, their “order” (*tart¯ıb*). They are infinitely

*extendable* i.e., potentially, but not actually, infinite (e.g., someone

counting up through the integers, and never of course reaching

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infinity). Of the second type are sets with no internal rule of construction.

These can be actually infinite.41 The set of the past souls

at any time *t* is an infinite set of this second type. Potential infinity,

as it were, becomes tied to an intellectual operation (counting,

constructing a geometrical figure, etc.), whereas actual infinity may

exist even in the absence of any mind that could think discursively

through an infinite order.

Avicenna revisits Aristotle’s discussion of infinity not only by

upholding the existence of a “strong” actual infinity, but also by

showing that a certain type of potential infinity is much closer to

actual infinity than orthodox Peripatetics were willing to claim.

The decisive step consists in describing sublunar dynamic motion in

terms of a potential infinity that has much in common with actual

infinity. It is the idea of a *dynamic moment* that allows Avicenna

to do this. For every sublunar natural motion, there is an infinity of

dynamic states “in actuality.” These states are not purely potential,

since, unlike the points of a line, they have a principle of distinction

(each has a*mayl*-2). But their infinity is not entirely actual, since they

are not all present at the same time. Although Avicenna nowhere

presents a table such as the following, it may represent adequately

the distinctions he introduces in the Aristotelian classification:

**“strong” potential infinite “weak” actual infinite**

By addition, by division Recurrent events *a parte ante*

**“weak” potential infinite “strong” actual infinite**

Sublunar dynamic motion Souls of past men

It is in his *Glosses* (*Ta‘lı¯qa¯ t*) that Avicenna sets out in detail the distinction

between sublunar and supralunar motion. In order to do so,

he must explain how the *mayl*-2, which is characteristic of sublunar

motion, is something *real*:

The cause of the alteration (*al-istih.*

*a¯ la*) that supervenes on natural bodies

endowed with force consists in the places and the positions, insofar as rectilinear

motion is produced by nature and the mobile is not in its natural

state. And the cause of the renewal [reading *tajaddud* for *tah.*

*addud*] and

repetition of its movements, as well as the cause of the alteration (which

tends to the destruction of one force and to the renewal of one another) of

its nature, is the existence of “wheres” and actually determined positions

(*wuj ¯ udu uy ¯ unin wa awd. ¯ a‘in mutah.*

*addidatin bi-al-fi‘l*), from the beginning

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of the movement until it comes to a rest. For nature does not cease, at every

instant (*fı¯ kulli a¯nin*), to be in a new state, different from the previous one.

And what makes these to be *states* are the changing *mayls* (*wa ha¯dhihi*

*ah.*

*wa¯ lun li-al-muyu¯ li al-mutabaddila*). This case is similar to the alteration

of this or that quality, e.g., an extraneous temperature of the water, which

does not cease, at every instant, to be altered – increased or diminished –

until the water returns to its natural state. The renewed cause of this process

is the existence of “wheres” and positions actually determined.42

Four points must be emphasized regarding this passage.

(a) The repeated use Avicenna makes of the terms “renewal”

(*tajaddud*, *tajaddada*) and “state” (*h.*

*a¯ l*) allows us to understand

in all its complexity his position relative to contemporary

*kala¯m*, and to the school of Abu¯ Ha¯ shim in particular.

With the latter’s disciples, Avicenna holds that there

is a renewal of the movement at every instant, and that

the moving thing, at every instant, is in a different *state*.

This state is characterized by a position (Avicenna’s *wad.*

*‘*

corresponds to the *h.*

*ayyiz* of the *mutakallimu¯ n*) and produced

by an impulsion (Avicenna’s *mayl*, the *i‘tima¯d* of the

*mutakallimu¯ n*). These similarities underline the fundamental

difference between the two systems: their interpretation

of continuity. Whereas between any two Avicennian positions,

there exists always a third one (and so on *ad infinitum*),

Abu¯ Ha¯ shimand his disciples theoreticallymaintain a

series of discrete positions, even if they take great care not to

determine these atomic thresholds quantitatively. Avicenna

is quite skeptical about the discontinuity and finitism of the

*kala¯m*theory, but does not seemto reject its notion of *tawallud*

(“engendering”), to which his *tajaddud* appears roughly

equivalent. One may thus interpret Avicenna’s doctrine as a

continuist reformulation of the dynamical principles of Abu¯

H¯ashim.

(b) This implies that Avicenna distances himself from Aristotle’s

conception of potential continuity, since every point

of the trajectory has a *principle of distinction* dictated by its

*mayl*. At a terminological level, this tension is conveyed by

the word “alteration” (*istih.*

*a¯ la*), which Avicenna employs in

order to describe the variations of the movement’s intensity.

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We know that in Arabic Peripateticism, this word is the

translation of the Greek *alloioˆ sis*, change in the category of

quality (*poiotˆes*). This apparent misuse reflects the fact that

Avicenna does not find at his disposal, in the Aristotelian

terminology, a word perfectly suited to the reality he wishes

to describe. The term “alteration” is no longer confined to

the transition from a (qualitative) beginning to a (qualitative)

end, but can also refer to the instantaneous variability of the

movement itself.

(c) Avicenna consciously remains just shy of accepting an actual

infinity. He says twice that the successive positions of the

mobile are *actually* (*bi-al-fi‘l*), not just potentially, determined.

Since he obviously accepts that the points, and therefore

the positions, on any stretch AB are not finite in number,

he must conclude that all the elements of a non-finite set are

actually determined. Interestingly, however, Avicenna does

not say that they are *actually infinite*. For all the trajectory’s

states are not realized *together* (*ma‘an*).43

(d) This passage from the *Ta‘lı¯qa¯ t* permits us finally to understand

Avicenna’s general theory of motion, as it appears

in particular in the *Physics* of the *Shifa¯ ’* (bk. II, ch. 1).44

Avicenna stresses there that we can mean two things when

we speak of “motion”: motion as a trajectory, which pertains

to our imaginative faculty and is conceived of only as

linking a starting point to an end; and motion as an intermediary

state, which must be attributed to each moment of

the trajectory. Motion in the second sense characterizes an

infinitesimal moment, and nothing else. The present text of

the *Ta‘lı¯qa¯ t* is the only passage where Avicenna draws such a

strong connection between the*mayl*-2 and this second sense

of “movement.” The*mayl* represents the principle of distinction

of each position of the trajectory. Each substance spatially

or qualitatively removed from its natural state (e.g., a

stone thrown up away from its natural resting place) returns

to it, passing through *all* intermediary states. Each of these

intermediary states, because it is not the end point of the process,

produces a new*mayl*,which adds itself to the impulsion

produced by the others. Every moment is thus characterized

by its own kinetic intensity.45

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Avicenna can thus explain the fundamental difference between

sublunar and supralunar motion. Unlike the trajectory of the four

sublunar elements, the trajectory of a heavenly body has no real

principle of distinction for its positions; the principle of distinction

exists only in the imaginative faculty of the celestial substance. In

other words, Avicenna accepts in this case an interpretation of continuity

akin to that of Aristotle, where the potentiality (*dunamis*) is

hardly to be distinguished from a purely imaginative existence (cf.

*Physics*, VIII.8): “the reason for the alteration of the celestial body

is not its positions but its imagination and its renewed volition, one

imaginative act after the other.”46

Avicenna thus seems to stand at the crossroads of two traditions.

With the mathematicians, he recognizes that every one of the infinite

points on a spatial interval AB, without perhaps being perfectly

real, is however notionally and qualitatively distinct from every

other point. But with the *mutakallimu¯ n*, he sees in a dynamic of

impetus the efficient principle of such a distinction. Thus, starting

from a classificatory project of the different types of impetus,

Avicenna arrives at a complex – because partially “ontological” –

doctrine of instantaneous motion. This combination of the kinematics

of the geometers and the dynamics of *mutakallimu¯ n* deeply

influenced Avicenna’s successors in the East and theWest. It is probably

Avicenna’s main achievement in natural philosophy that after

him, for every lucid reader, the discussion of motion must focus on

what happens at an infinitesimal level.

post-avicennian kal ￣am: an overview

We have already seen that the great *mutakallimu¯ n* of the tenth

century did not hesitate to appeal to the authority of Euclid in

defense of their atomism. But because of the finitist principles of

their ontology, they limited themselves to assimilating their indivisibles

to the points of the geometers. After Avicenna, and probably

under the influence of his doctrine of continuity and the infinite,

the *mutakallimu¯ n* seem ever more eager to extend their appeal

to geometry from the model of the point to that of the line. This

shift is made possible only by concentrating, even more than previously,

on the question of motion, and above all by putting tacitly

aside the finitist considerations that were characteristic of the

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school of Abu¯ al-Hudhayl.47 The modern historian is struck by the

impression that thinkers after Avicenna, apart from rather verbal

polemics on some refined – and sometimes extremely interesting –

points, share a more or less common doctrine of motion as a realized

set of punctual moments. But whereas orthodox Avicennians

insist that the moments of the trajectory belong to a *continuum*,

the *mutakallimu¯ n* stress that each kinetic point is *totally and perfectly*

*realized*. What makes the discussion somewhat scholastic is

that the latter more than ever avoid emphasizing the finite character

of this set of points, while the former, as we have seen, refrain

from admitting clearly that what we have here is nothing other

than a pure actual infinity. They seem rather to consider sublunar

motion as a false potential infinity, or, so to speak, a virtual actual

infinity.

By far the most interesting discussion on these topics appears

in the sixth book of the *Mat.*

*a¯ lib al-‘a¯ liyya* of Fakhr al-Dı¯n al-Ra¯zı¯

(d. 1210). He dedicates lengthy chapters to the opposition between

continuism and atomism, and carefully and honestly presents the

“geometrical proofs” that each doctrine uses as support. Two aspects

of al-R¯az¯ı’s approach are striking. First, he is dealingwith the foundations

of geometry, since the discussion of atomism leads him to discuss

such questions as the generation of geometrical objects through

motion and the fifth Postulate (in both cases, al-R¯az¯ı levels criticisms

at the mathematicians). Second, atomism is no longer simply

opposed to geometry,48 but is taken to be confirmed by at least some

geometrical postulates.

It is impossible to summarize here the numerous arguments and

counterarguments presented by al-R¯az¯ı. Very broadly, we can distinguish

two main intuitions in the argumentation of the atomists.

First, they rely on the generation of simple geometrical figures by

motion, in particular the generation of the line by the motion of a

point. A line perpendicular to a surface, moved in a direction parallel

to this surface, will trace a line on the surface. This shows that at

every instant, the line is in contact with the surface in one distinct

indivisible. Second, they appeal to tangent lines. A line can be in

contact with a circle at one single point only if indivisible parts do

exist. It is worth noting that these reflections are permitted by the

re-evaluation of the epistemic status of the imagination, which as

mentioned above is typical of classical *kala¯m*.

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On the other side, the continuists appeal again and again to the

incommensurability of the side and the diagonal of the square. If both

the side and diagonal contain a finite number of indivisibles – let us

say *p* and *q* respectively – then the ratio *p/q* ought to be a rational

number. But of course, this is not the case. The only escape for the

adversary would be to postulate that there is vacuum between the

indivisible parts – which is, mathematically speaking, no escape at

all. The rhetoric of these polemics aside, we have already alluded to

the fact that the positive argument of the atomists tacitly renounces

the traditional finitism of atomism. The “indivisible parts” of the

late*mutakallimu¯ n* becomemore andmore akin to “positions” in an

Avicennian sense. We ought however to realize that in taking this

physical turn, the *mutakallimu¯ n* are simply bringing out a latent

aspect of classical (pre-Avicennian) *kala¯m*, to which Avicenna too

had been sensible.

This suffices in any case to show that from the eleventh century

C.E. onward, all parties recognize the validity, in sublunar physics,

of a theory of infinitesimal positions characterized by dynamic

moments. It is probable that these decisive transformations of the

Aristotelian doctrine of continuity, and the positing of a new relationship

between imagination and reality that made these transformations

possible, deeply influenced Latin preclassical physics49 and

European scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

notes

1 The exceptions are extremely rare. One thinks of al-J ¯ah. iz.

, partially

transmitted because of his literary skill, and of al-Kind¯ı’s philosophical

treatises, preserved in *one* Istanbul manuscript.

2 On what follows, see also Rashed [199].

3 The *mutakallimu¯ n* intensely debated the nature of the relation of

the minimal body to its indivisibles. See, e.g., Al-Ash‘arı¯, *Maqa¯ la¯ t alislamiyy*

*¯ın*, ed.H. Ritter, 3rd edn. (Wiesbaden: 1980), 302.16–306.13; Ibn

Mattawayh, *Al-Tadhkira f¯ı ah.*

*k¯ amal-jaw¯ ahir wa al-a‘r ¯ ad.*

, ed. S.N. Lut.f

and F. B. ‘Un (Cairo: 1975), 47–8, 193.7ff.

4 It is true that al-Naz.z.

a¯m objects to Abu¯ al-Hudhayl that parts without

extension cannot produce an extended body (see Ibn Mattawayh,

*Tadhkira*, 189.4–5). This is not, however, meant to prove that there are

no indivisible parts at all, but only that Abu¯ al-Hudhayl has not carried

his atomism of motion as far as he could have done. Otherwise, he

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would have realized that atomism is properly a theory about motion, or

kinetics, and not about “chemical” composition. Briefly put, al-Naz.z.

¯am

recognizes the existence of unextended indivisibles, but denies that they

play any role in the *constitution* of bodies. They are rather to be understood

as *positions*.

5 See D. Furley, *Two Studies in the Greek Atomists* (Princeton: 1967),

117ff.

6 See S. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, 4 vols. (Cambridge:

1922), vol. I, 326–30; S. Radhakrishnan and C. H. Moore, *A Sourcebook*

*in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton: 1957), 412. Cf. S. Pines, *Beitra¨ ge zur*

*islamischen Atomenlehre* (Berlin: 1936), 112–23; for English translation

see Pines [198].

7 See M. Aouad and M. Rashed, “L’ex’eg`ese de la *Rh´etorique* d’Aristote:

recherches sur quelques commentateurs grecs, arabes et byzantins, 1`ere

partie,” *Medioevo* 23 (1997), 43–189, at 89–91.

8 See Dhanani [193], 106.

9 See al-Sharı¯f al-Murtada¯ , *Ama¯ lı¯ al-Murtada¯ : Ghurar al-fawa¯ ’id wa*

*durar al-qala¯ ’id*, ed. M. A. Ibra¯hı¯m, 2 vols. (Cairo: 1998), vol. I, 182.1ff.

10 There are however some very interesting transformations, in particular

concerning atomic motion and the continuity of time.

11 Ibn Mattawayh, *Tadhkira*, 162.8–11.

12 Cf. Euclid, *Elements*, V, def. 4.

13 Ibn S¯ın¯a [Avicenna], *al-Mub¯ ah.*

*atha¯ t*, ed. M. Bı¯da¯ rfar (Qom: 1413 A.H./

1992 C.E.), 363–4, §1136.

14 Ibn Mattawayh, *Tadhkira*, 162.12–14.

15 Euclid, *Elements*, I, def. 1.

16 See in particular W. Detel, *Aristoteles: “Analytica Posteriora”* (Berlin:

1993), 189–232.

17 For a good synthesis of the traditional arguments against the use of

imagination by the *mutakallimu¯ n*, see the “warning” (*tanbı¯h*) in Ibn

Maymu¯ n, *Dala¯ la al-h. a¯ ’irı¯n*, ed. H. Atay (Ankara: 1974), 209.21–211.25.

18 Ibn Mattawayh, *Tadhkira*, 163.1–4.

19 Ibn Mattawayh, *Tadhkira*, 163.5–8.

20 A list of the preserved fragments is to be found in D. Gimaret,

“Mat’eriaux pour une bibliographie des Gubb¯a’¯ı,” *Journal asiatique* 264

(1976), 277–332, at 312. To this can be added al-B¯ır ¯ un¯ı, *Tah.*

*dı¯d niha¯yat*

*al-Am¯ akin li-tas.h.*

*ı¯h. masa¯ fa¯ t al-masa¯kin*, ed. V. Bulgakov and I. Ah.mad,

2 vols. (Cairo: 1964), 185–6.

21 See the discussion (with further literature) in C. Wildberg, *John*

*Philoponus’ Criticism of Aristotle’s Theory of Aether* (Berlin: 1988),

28–37.

22 See van Ess [44], vol. III, 418–45 and below.

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23 SeeG.W. Leibniz, *Pacidius Philalethi*, Academy Edition, 6th ser., vol. III

(Berlin: 1980), 528–71, at 568.1–3: “Hincmirifice confirmatur quod praeclare

olim a Theologis dictum est conservationem esse perpetuam creationem,

huic enim sententiae affine est quod a te [sc. Leibniz] demonstratur

mutationem omnem quandam esse transcreationem.” We learn

from other documents that Leibniz was deeply interested in the theories

of the *mutakallimu¯ n*. I present and investigate the relevant material in

my French translation of the *Pacidius Philalethi*, to appear in 2004.

24 See Avicenna, *Risa¯ lat al-adh. awiyya fı¯ al-ma‘a¯d*, ed. and Italian trans.

in Avicenna, *Epistola sulla vita futura*, ed. F. Lucchetta (Padua: 1969),

114–15.

25 Cf. al-J ¯ah. iz.

, *Kita¯b al-h. ayawa¯n*, ed. A.S.M. Harun, 7 vols. (Cairo: 1938–

45), vol. V, 113.8ff.

26 See van Ess [44], vol. III, 428–45 and vol. VI, 76–8.

27 See Th¯abit ibn Qurra, *Answers to the Questions of Ibn Ussayyid*, in A.

Sabra, “Th¯abit ibn Qurra on the Infinite and Other Puzzles,” *Zeitschrift*

*fu¨ r Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften* 11 (1997),

1–33.

28 See M. Rashed, “A ‘New’ Text of Alexander on the Soul’s Motion,” in

*Aristotle and After*, ed. R. Sorabji (London: 1997), 181–95.

29 See R. Morelon, *Th¯abit ibn Qurra: OEuvres d’astronomie* (Paris: 1987),

LXXVIII–LXXIX.

30 See Rashed [201], 9–14.

31 See M. Naz. ı¯f, “A¯ ra¯ ’ al-fala¯ sifati al-islamiyyı¯n fı¯ al-h. araka wa

mus¯ahamatuhum f¯ı al-tamh. ¯ıd il ¯a ba‘d ma‘ ¯an¯ı ‘ilm al-d¯ın¯am¯ık¯a alh.

adı¯th,” *Al-jam‘iyya al-mis. riyya li-ta¯ rı¯kh al-‘ulu¯m* 2 (1942–3), 45–64.

32 See H. Bellosta, “Cinematica,” *Storia della scienza*, vol. III: *La civilta`*

*islamica* (Rome: 2002), 642–6.

33 See M. Rashed, “Dinamica,” *Storia della scienza*, vol. III: *La civilta`*

*islamica* (Rome: 2002), 624–42.

34 See Hasnawi [194], with further bibliography.

35 See M. Wolff, *Fallgesetz und Massbegriff* (Berlin: 1971), and M. Wolff,

“Philoponus and the Rise of Preclassical Dynamics,” in *Philoponus and*

*the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, ed. R. Sorabji (London: 1987).

36 See Ibn Mattawayh, *Tadhkira*, 488.9–11 (cf. 473.9–11): “The reason why

the fall of the light body differs from the fall of the heavy body is the air

that is in the atmosphere. Because otherwise, if we threw a stone and a

feather, they would fall in the same time. But the air prevents the light

body from falling, whereas the heavy body cuts through it.”

37 For more details on this issue, see also A. Sayili, “Ibn S¯ın¯a and Buridan

on the Dynamics of Projectile Motion,” in *Ibn Sı¯na¯ : O¨ lu¨mu¨ n bininci*

*yılı Armaflani 1984’ten ayribasim* (Ankara: 1984).

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38 The general equivalence between the notion of *mayl* and *i‘tima¯d* was

accepted by the ancient scholars themselves (cf. Naz. ı¯f, “A¯ ra¯ ’,” 51).

39 Ibn Mattawayh, *Tadhkira*, 596.19–597.13.

40 Avicenna, *al-Shifa¯ ’: al-t.abı¯‘iyya¯ t* [*Physics*], vol. I, *Al-sama¯ ‘ al-t.abı¯‘ı¯*, ed.

S. Z¯ayid (Cairo: 1983), 325.19–326.1.

41 Avicenna, *Shifa¯ ’: Physics*, 212: “We say . . . that it is impossible, in

things counted and endowed with a natural or positional order (*la-ha¯*

*tart¯ıbun f¯ı al-t.ab‘ aw f¯ı al-wad.*

*‘*), that there be a magnitude or a number

existing that is actually infinite.”

42 Avicenna, *Ta‘lı¯qa¯ t*, ed. ‘A. Badawı¯ (Bengazi: 1972), 101–14, 105.6–13 in

part.

43 More on this criterion in Ibn Sı¯na¯ [Avicenna], *Risa¯ la ila¯ al-wazı¯r Abı¯*

*Sa‘d*, ed. and French trans. Y. Michot (Beirut: 2000), 32–3.

44 See A. Maier, *Zwischen Philosophie und Mechanik* (Rome: 1958),

12–20, and Hasnawi [195].

45 Because every instant of movement is characterized by a *mayl*-2, it is

useful and necessary to reform Aristotle’s doctrine and to introduce an

instantaneous movement, “the thing of which we have shown that it

is really the motion,” as Avicenna calls it (see the numerous references

collected in Hasnawi [195], 236 n. 44).

46 See Avicenna, *Ta‘l¯ıq¯ at* 105.14–15: *wa laysa sababu istih.*

*a¯ latihi*

*awd. a¯ ‘ahu bal tawahhumahu wa ira¯datahu al-mutajaddidata tawahhuman*

*ba‘da tawahhumin*.

47 Which explains why the criticisms of the continuists now focus on the

alleged finitism of their adversaries.

48 As it was in the Aristotelian tradition. Cf. *Physics*, VI, *De Caelo*, III.4,

303a20–4, III.7, 306a26–b2.

49 For Latin mathematical atomism, probably influenced by the

*mutakallimu¯ n* through the refutations of Avicenna, Averroes, and

Maimonides, see B. Pabst, *Atomtheorien des lateinischen Mittelalters*

(Darmstadt: 1994), 276–85 with further references.

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15 Psychology: soul and intellect

Most Arabic philosophers took the general inspiration for their discussions

of soul (*al-nafs*) and intellect (*al-‘aql*) from the Arabic translations

of Aristotle’s *De Anima* and *Parva Naturalia* and later Greek

commentaries on Aristotle, although a few philosophers, such as

al-R¯az¯ı, were of a more Platonic bent.1 In addition to assimilating

Greek sources into their own philosophical psychology, Arabic

philosophers were also sensitive to the need to address the competing

views of the Islamic theologians (*mutakallimu¯ n*), who upheld an

atomistic metaphysics in which all created beings were understood

to be mere aggregates of atoms and accidents held together by God’s

absolute power. This yielded a bundle theory of personal identity

which left no room for an immaterial soul. Such a view of human

nature was vehemently denied by the philosophers, although it was

attractive to the theologians since it allowed them to offer an account

of the revealed doctrine of the resurrection of the body.2

the nature of the soul and its relation

to the body

Unlike their theological adversaries, all the Arabic philosophers

accepted some conception of the soul derived from the Greek tradition.

In most cases it was Aristotle’s definition of the soul in *De*

*Anima*, II.1, as the first “form” or “actuality” of a body which is

potentially alive, that held sway. Under this conception, the soul is

simply the animating and organizing principle of a body and is therefore

“inseparable from the body.”3 Most of the Arabic philosophers

also accepted Aristotle’s division of the parts and powers of the soul,

according to which “soul” is an ordered genus divided into three

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species, corresponding to the division of living things into plants,

animals, and humans. The lowest power of the soul is the nutritive

or vegetative, which is common to all living bodies – plants, animals,

and humans alike; next is the sensitive soul, which belongs to animals

as well as humans; and finally the intellective or rational soul,

which is unique to human beings.

While this Aristotelian account of the soul was accepted by most

philosophers in the Arabic tradition, both al-R¯az¯ı and Avicenna took

exception to it in some way. In the case of al-R¯az¯ı, the entire Aristotelian

view of the soul and its powers was rejected in favor of

an account based in large part on Plato’s *Timaeus*.4 Al-R¯az¯ı accepts

Plato’s tripartite division of the soul into the desiderative, the spirited,

and the rational, and he upholds a belief in the transmigration

of souls which greatly downplays the divide between humans and

other animals. Al-R¯az¯ı also subscribes to the *Timaeus*’ conception of

aWorld Soul, from which all animal and human souls in the present

world have fallen, a Fall which he recounts in mythic form.5

Unlike al-R¯az¯ı, Avicenna does not reject the Aristotelian conception

of the soul outright, but he upholds a formof soul–body dualism

that is foreign to Aristotle. While Aristotle and most of his Arabic

followers allow for the possibility that the human intellect is separable

from the body, this holds for them only to the extent that the

intellect is separable from the rest of the soul as well. For Avicenna,

by contrast, the individual human soul is more than a physical entity

and organizing principle for the body. It is a subsistent being in its

own right, and a complete substance independent of any relation it

has to the body.6

This dualistic perspective on human nature is evident in many

places in Avicenna’s psychology, but the best-known of these is a

thought experiment that has come to be known as the “flying man,”

a precursor ofDescartes’ famous *cogito, ergo sum* argument inwhich

Avicenna attempts to show that human self-awareness is entirely

non-sensory.7 To conduct the experiment, the reader is asked to

imagine herself in a state in which all forms of sensory perception

are impossible. This means that one must bracket (1) all previously

acquired sense knowledge; and (2) all occurrent sensation. The first

is done by imagining oneself as newly created, but as a mature adult

with full rational capacities. The second is accomplished by imagining

oneself suspended in a void in such a way that one’s limbs

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do not touch each other, thereby cutting oneself off from sensing

both external objects and one’s own body (hence, the label “flying

man”). Avicenna claims that even under these conditions, each of us

would undoubtedly affirm her own existence. But that affirmation

can in no way depend upon the experience of having a body, for the

very state hypothesized in the thought experiment abstracts from all

bodily experience.8

Despite his dualism, Avicenna recognizes that there are close ties

between the soul and the body. The body serves as an instrument for

the soul, and it is a necessary condition for its creation and individuation.

While this may seem to conflict with Avicenna’s claim that

the soul is subsistent, Avicenna is forced to uphold this position

on metaphysical grounds. Unlike the separate or angelic intelligences,

each individual of which constitutes a species unto itself,

“humanity” is a single species common to many individuals, and

numerical multiplicity within a species is a function of matter.

Avicenna places the creation of human souls within the framework

of his theory of emanation. Whenever the appropriate material conditions

are present in the sublunar world (that is, whenever a human

embryo is conceived), the agent intellect concomitantly creates a

human soul to inform that body. According to this picture, then, the

true cause of the existence of the individual human soul is the agent

intellect itself, and the parents merely serve to prepare a material

body appropriate for receiving it. The soul and the body are thus made

for each other, and the soul has a special attraction to its own body,

which aids it in the performance of many of its operations. This,

Avicenna argues, also refutes theories advocating the pre-existence

of a single World Soul and transmigration, such as those upheld by

al-R¯az¯ı.

Despite the soul’s dependence upon the body for its initial creation,

Avicenna denies that the soul requires the body for its continued

existence. Upon the death of the body, the soul retains its individuality

in virtue of its own intrinsic substantiality, and because

of the persistence of individuating characteristics that defined its

embodied life. The very fact of having been born with a particular

body and having uniquely individual experiences while in that body

affects the soul itself. Different souls thus achieve different levels

of perfection through the use they make of their individual bodies,

and those differences will remain after death.9 Thus, Avicenna alone

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among the *fala¯ sifa* upholds the *personal* immortality of the individual

human soul.

soul as a principle of cognition

One of the most important functions of the soul is to serve as the

principle of cognition, both sensitive and intellectual. In the Arabic

tradition, the divide between the senses and the intellect was a fundamental

assumption of all cognitive psychology, and the contribution

of the senses to human knowledge was always subordinated to that of

the intellect, on the grounds that sensation is always of the particular

and operates through a bodily organ, whereas true knowledge is of the

universal. Despite their professed devaluation of sense-knowledge,

however, some of the most original developments in Arabic philosophy

arise from the efforts of Arabic philosophers to explain the nature

and mechanics of sense-perception.

Moreover, while a deep chasm is posited between sense and intellect

in terms of their cognitive value, the Arabic philosophers offered

a general theory of the nature of cognition that was applicable to

both sensation and intellection. The ultimate foundation of their

theory was Aristotle’s description of cognition as the reception of

the form of the perceived object without its matter.10 The result

of their attempts to explain and expand upon this remark was the

theory that *intentionality* is the mark of cognition.

“Intentionality” is a concept that continues to influence contemporary

philosophy of mind, where it refers to the directedness of

mental states toward objects, and it has a similar meaning in its original

usage in Arabic philosophy. In the technical terminology of the

Arabic philosophers, an “intention” (*ma‘nan*) – literally a “meaning”

or an “idea” – is a formor essence insofar as it is apprehended by any

cognitive faculty and serves as an object for that faculty. There are

thus different types of intentions corresponding to the various cognitive

faculties – color and sound are sensible intentions, for example;

images are intentions in the faculty of imagination; and universal

concepts are intelligible or understood intentions. The exact origins

of the philosophers’ concept of intentionality are unclear, and no

completely satisfactory explanation has been offered. One important

precedent comes from the Islamic *mutakallimu¯ n*, for whom

*ma‘nan* was one of the technical terms for accidents.11 As for the

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English term “intention,” it came to be applied to the Arabic concept

through the use of *intentio* as the medieval Latin translation of

*ma‘nan*. While not a literal rendition of the Arabic, the term nicely

reflects one of the few explicit definitions of intentionality offered by

Avicenna inhis *Interpretation*. According to this definition,*ma‘a¯nin*

are “what is intended by the soul” (*maqa¯ s. ida li-al-nafs*), that is, they

are the things that linguistic expressions are meant to signify.12 For

Avicenna intentionality is interpreted as the mental *existence* of the

formor quiddity that is perceived in the soul of the perceiver, and it is

closely connected to his metaphysical distinction between essence

and existence.13 While Averroes rejects the metaphysical basis for

Avicenna’s understanding of intentions, he too upholds the thesis

that as sensible, imagined, or intelligible intentions, the forms of

the objects that we know can be said to exist in some way in our

souls, so that all cognized forms have two “subjects.” One subject,

the “subject of truth,” is the object to which the cognitive act refers,

and by which its truth or falsity is determined, ultimately, the extramental

thing itself. The other subject, the “subject of existence,” is

the faculty inwhich the form exists as an intention, be it the senses,

the imagination, or the intellect.14

In addition to providing the foundation for the Arabic theory of

intentionality, the claim that cognition involves the reception of

form apart from matter also led the Arabic philosophers to interpret

not only intellectual cognition, but also sensation, as a type of

*abstraction* (*tajr¯ıd*). Hence all cognition came to be viewed as a hierarchy

of grades of abstraction beginning with the senses and reaching

its apex in the intellect. The abstractive hierarchy receives its

first explicit formulation with Avicenna, who defines “perception”

(*idra¯k*) as the “grasping (*akhdh*) of the formof the thing apprehended

in some way,” adding that “the kinds of abstraction vary and differ in

degree.”15 Avicenna identifies four grades of abstraction, with sensation

the lowest, intellection the highest, and the two middle grades

occupied by the faculties which were known in the Arabic tradition

as “the internal senses” (*al-h. aw¯ ass al-b¯ at.*

*ina*).16

The doctrine of the internal senses is an attempt to expand and systematize

Aristotle’s account of the pre-intellectual capacities of the

soul that could not simply be explained as functions of the five external

senses of vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Among these

capacities were the common sense (*koinˆe aisthˆesis*), the imagination

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(*phantasia*), and memory. The doctrine of the internal senses also

drew upon later Greek developments in physiology stemming from

the physician Galen. Like the external senses, the internal senses

require a bodily organ to performtheir operations, usually identified

as the brain, following Galen, or less frequently the heart, following

Aristotle.

The theory of the internal senses is not yet evident in al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s

writings of undisputed authenticity.17 Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı presents instead a

sparse Aristotelian scheme that includes the common sense power,

which is assigned the task of collecting and collating the information

provided by the five senses, and the imagination, both of which are

localized in the heart rather than the brain. Initially, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı assigns

two functions to the imagination, the capacity to retain sensible

impressions when the external object itself is absent, and the ability

to compose and divide these retained impressions into combinations

that may or may not represent real objects in the external world. To

these two he later adds a third function, “imitation” (*muh. a¯ka¯ t*), by

which he seems to mean the depiction of an object by means of

an image other than its own. To imitate *x*, then, is to imagine *x* by

depicting it under sensible qualities that do not describe its own sensible

appearance. Through imitation, the imagination can represent

not only sensible bodies, but also bodily temperaments, emotions,

and even abstract universals, as happens when evil, for example, is

symbolized by the image of darkness.18 The imitative capacities of

imagination are also the foundation for al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s characterization

of the prophet, that is, the founder of a religion. In virtue of possessing

a strong imaginative faculty, the prophet is able to receive an

“overflow” of intelligibles into his imagination, where they become

subject to symbolic imitation. Through these symbols and images,

the prophet can communicate abstract truths in concrete terms that

can be understood by simple believers.

The full spectrum of internal sense powers makes its first appearance

in the works of Avicenna, who posits five internal sense powers,

each assigned to its own location within the ventricles of the brain.

Avicenna justifies his positing of each of these sense powers by a set

of principles for differentiating psychological faculties. Of these principles,

two are fundamental. The first is the claimthat the reception

and retention of sensibles must be functions of distinct faculties, a

principle supported by the observation that in the physical world

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what receives an imprint easily, for example, water, does not retain

that imprint well. The second is the claim that a diversity of objects

diversifies faculties. The most innovative and influential part of

Avicenna’s theory of the internal senses is his assertion that perceptual

objects are of two types. One sort of perceptual object is a

sensible form, that is, an image of one of the five proper sensibles

of color, sound, taste, smell, and texture, or an image of one of the

common sensibles, objects perceptible by two or more senses, such

as motion, magnitude, and shape. The other sort of object is one that

Avicenna calls an “intention” (*ma‘nan*), using the same term that

Arabic philosophers had adopted to signify the object of any cognitive

faculty.

In the context of the internal senses, Avicenna defines an “intention”

as a property which is not essentially material or sensible, but

which in some way accompanies a sensible form. Avicenna often

illustrates this with the example of the sheep’s instinctive perception

of hostility in the wolf. “Hostility” is not itself a sensible form

like color or motion, but it must still be an object of sense perception

in some way, for animals perceive intentions of this sort. Indeed, it

is our observation of animal behavior and the underlying perceptual

capacities that such behavior presupposes that requires the positing

of an internal sense faculty for grasping intentions, since animals do

not have reason or intellect. Avicenna calls the faculty which grasps

intentions “estimation” (*wahm*).19 Nonetheless, Avicenna does not

confine estimation to animals, and humans too have an estimative

faculty. Nor does Avicenna limit estimative intentions to affective

properties such as hostility and friendliness. Rather, the estimative

faculty ultimately functions as the animal analogue to the intellect,

directing and controlling all the judgments of the sensitive soul and

allowing it to associate sensible descriptionswith individual objects,

a capacitywhich Aristotle calls “incidental” perception, for example,

my perception of the white thing as Diares’ son.20

From the principles we have examined, Avicenna deduces four of

the five internal sense faculties: the common sense receives, distinguishes,

and collates sensible forms from the external senses,

and they are then stored in the retentive imagination (*al-khaya¯ l*),

sometimes called the formative faculty (*al-mus.*

*awwira*); estimation

receives non-sensible intentions, and they are retained in the memorative

faculty. Avicenna also posts a fifth internal sense power, the

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compositive imagination (*al-mutakhayyila*), which is the ability to

manipulate images and intentions rather than receive them passively

from external objects. Avicenna seems to hold that the compositive

imagination is always engaged in the random creation of new images,

even unconsciously and during sleep, when it produces dreams. Its

random activity can, however, be controlled and directed to specific

ends. When the ends are those of the sensitive or animal soul, the

director is the estimative faculty. But in humans the compositive

imagination can also be placed under rational control, and when

this happens, its proper designation is the “cogitative” faculty (*almufakkira*).

In Avicenna the cogitative faculty – that is, the entity

formed by the cooperation between the intellect and the imagination

– is responsible for a good deal of what we would ordinarily call

“thinking,” including the analysis and synthesis of propositions and

syllogistic reasoning.21

The most innovative element inAvicenna’s theory of the internal

senses, the positing of the estimative faculty, was also the most controversial

for later authors. Averroes eliminates this faculty entirely

in animals, arguing that it is superfluous, since sensation and imagination

are able in their own right to perceive their objects as pleasant

and painful.22 But Averroes does accept Avicenna’s claim that the

senses perceive “intentions” as distinct from mere sensible forms.

Averroes, however, believes that the perception of intentions is distinctive

of human sensation, and he assigns it to the cogitative

and memorative faculties. Thus Averroes reduces the total number

of internal senses to four: common sense, imagination, cogitation,

and memory, substituting cogitation for estimation in humans and

rejecting the distinction between compositive and retentive imagination.

Moreover, for Averroes intentions are no longer defined as any

non-sensible properties conveyed by the senses. Instead, an intention

is the property that allows us to grasp the individual as such, and its

function is thus limited to explaining incidental perception.

Avicenna and Averroes also offer different versions of the scale

of abstraction as it applies to the external and internal senses.

For Avicenna, there are two distinct grades of abstraction within

the internal senses, corresponding to the retentive imagination

(*al-khaya¯ l*) and estimation. Imagination is deemed more abstract

than sensation (including both the external senses and the common

sense), since the sense powers can only operate through contact with

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objects that are actually present to them, whereas imagination is able

to imagine objects which are no longer physically present. Estimation

is the most abstract sense power, however, because its objects,

intentions, are in themselves non-sensible properties. Nonetheless

estimation remains at the level of sensible abstraction because its

objects are always particular and conveyed through sensible forms

and qualities. The sheep, for example, does not fear the universal

wolf, but always *this* particular wolf that it encounters.

Averroes makes extensive use of the claimthat sensation is a form

of abstraction in his account of the perceptual capacities of both

the external and the internal senses. He claims that sensible forms,

such as colors, exist in a nobler and more immaterial way in the

soul of the perceiver than they do in extramental objects. Averroes

often describes their abstract, perceptual mode of existence as a more

“spiritual” one (*ru¯ h. a¯niyya*), borrowing a term used extensively by

his Andalusian predecessor, Ibn B¯ajja. As a favorite illustration of

this point, Averroes notes that the senses are not subject to material

limitations such as the inability to be simultaneously affected by

contraries. While a physical body cannot be black and white in the

same respect at the same time, nor can a very large body be contained

within a small one, the eye can actually see black and white at the

same time, and despite its own small size it can be visually informed

by the entire hemisphere.23

Still, Averroes admits that sensible abstraction retains some tinge

of materiality, for it perceives particulars rather than universals, and

this requires some sort of relation to the matter that makes individual

intentions individual. This explains why the senses require

media, such as the air, to convey the forms of their objects to them.

The medium functions as a sort of connector which preserves a relation

between the percipient and its material object, even though the

act of sensation itself remains abstract. But since sensation itself is

spiritual, the mediummust also share some spiritual properties, such

as the ability to receive and convey contraries simultaneously. The

medium, then, must be quasi-spiritual and included on the hierarchy

of abstraction, albeit at a lower grade than the senses themselves.

As for the internal senses, Averroes assigns a distinct grade of

abstraction to each power, with cogitation and memory the most

spiritual senses because of their concern with the individual intention,

which Averroes likens to the “fruit” or “core” of the sensible,

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in contrast to its external qualities or “rinds.” The limit of sensible

abstraction, then, is the ability to perceive and identify an individual

whole, such as an individual person like Zayd or Socrates, and the

perception of the individual as an individual is the sensible analogue

to the perception of the universal as universal.24

intellect

The framework for all Arabic theories of the intellect was provided by

Aristotle’s distinction in book III of the *De Anima* between the agent

and potential intellects. But the Arabic philosophers also identified

a number of additional stages of the intellect, a practice which they

inherited from the later Greek tradition. Both al-Kind¯ı and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı

wrote brief treatises which are concerned with clarifying these various

senses of the term “intellect.”25 Later, Avicenna and Averroes

would incorporate their own versions of these discussions into their

psychological works.26 Although individual philosophers interpret

the scheme differently to fit their own theories of how knowledge is

acquired, generally the Arabic Aristotelians identify four meanings

of “intellect”:

(1) The *agent* intellect of *De Anima*, III.5. The Arabic philosophers

all followed the prevailing view of the Greek commentators

that the agent intellect, which Aristotle declares to be

immortal and eternal, is a separate, immaterial substance,

not a faculty in each individual soul. Its function is to act as

an efficient cause of human understanding, either by rendering

objects intelligible or by actualizing the potential intellect,

or some combination of the two.

(2) The *potential* intellect, which is often called the *material*

intellect, following the practice of the Greek commentator

Alexander of Aphrodisias. For most of the Arabic philosophers

this is an innate capacity within the human soul

for receiving intelligibles, as discussed by Aristotle in *De*

*Anima*, III.4. Averroes, however, comes to believe that this

intellect, like the agent intellect, must also be a separate

substance and one for all humans.

(3) The *habitual* or *speculative* intellect, sometimes called the

*actual* intellect by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı. This is the status of the human

potential intellect once it has acquired some intelligibles and

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developed a habit or disposition for thinking at will. Avicenna

subdivides it into two stages, using the label “habitual

intellect” to describe the acquisition of primary intelligibles,

such as the principle of non-contradiction, and the label

“actual intellect” for the acquisition of secondary intelligibles

deduced from them. To add to the terminological confusion,

al-Kind¯ı uses the label “acquired intellect” for this

stage of development.

(4) The *acquired* intellect (*al-‘aql al-mustafa¯d*, Latin *intellectus*

*adeptus*). For most Arabic philosophers this is the habitual

intellect when it has perfected itself by acquiring all possible

intelligibles. At this stage it becomes a completely

actual being akin to the separate intelligences, able to know

itself as well as the closest separate intelligence to us,

the agent intellect. In Avicenna, the acquired intellect is

simply the intellect when it is exercising knowledge that

it has previously learned, such as when the grammarian

parses a sentence. For Al-Kind¯ı, such an actual exercise

of stored knowledge is called the “appearing” or “second

intellect.”27

Averroes adds a fifth type of intellect to these four when he regularly

calls the imagination, or more precisely the cogitative faculty,

the “passive intellect,” the only term found in Aristotle’s own *De*

*Anima*.28 Modern readers take the passive intellect to be identical

to the potential intellect, but since Aristotle says that it is perishable,

Averroes follows an alternative interpretation among the Greek

commentators and reasons that it must be identified with a bodily

faculty.

The questions about the intellect that most concerned the Arabic

Aristotelians were the nature of the potential intellect and the explanation

of how intellectual cognition comes about. While there are

some minor discrepancies among al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s various writings on the

intellect, it is clear that for him the potential intellect is a faculty

of the individual human soul on which intelligibles are imprinted

through a process of abstraction. Since it is subject to generation

and corruption, the human potential intellect is not immortal in its

own right. Rather, its immortality depends on the degree to which

it actualizes itself by acquiring immaterial intelligibles, a process by

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which it gradually becomes freed from matter. This, in effect, is what

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı believes happens when a human being reaches the stage

of the acquired intellect. At this stage the individual human intellect

becomes entirely one with its immaterial intelligibles, thereby

attaining a status similar to that of the agent intellect itself. As a

result, the human acquired intellect is also able to have the agent

intellect as a further object of knowledge, to “conjoin” (*ittis.a¯ l*) with

it in a union of knower and known. Conjunction with the agent

intellect is identified by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı as the supreme human end and a

necessary condition for achieving immortality. Souls which do not

reach the level of acquired intellect in this life thus cannot survive

the death of the body, since they remain material and perishable.

But the immortality envisioned by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı does not seem to be a

personal one, and toward the end of his life al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı came to doubt

the viability of even this limited formof immortality. In his now-lost

commentary on Aristotle’s*Nicomachean Ethics*, known through the

reports of Ibn B¯ajja, Ibn T.

ufayl, and Averroes, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı is reported

to have abandoned belief in the possibility of conjunction with the

agent intellect, on the grounds that it would require the impossible

transformation of a material and contingent being into an immaterial

and eternal one.29

In contrast to al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, individual immortality is not a problem

for Avicenna since he holds that the soul is subsistent in

itself. Avicenna’s dualism also sets him apart from the other Arabic

philosophers in his account of the roles played by the potential and

agent intellects in the acquisition of knowledge. Just as the body

is only a preparatory cause that initially occasions the creation of

the individual, so too the sense powers play only a preparatory function

in the production of intelligibles. Indeed, the function of the

agent intellect in the production of human knowledge exactly parallels

its function in the creation of human souls: the consideration

of the corresponding sense images disposes the soul to receive one

universal rather than another, for example, “human being” rather

than “horse,” in exactly the same way that the species of the parents

disposes the matter of their offspring to receive one formrather than

another (that is, humans beget humans and horses beget horses).

The function of the agent intellect in this process is therefore not

to illumine the sense images so that universals can be abstracted

from them. The ultimate cause of the production of new intelligible

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concepts in individual minds is not an act of *abstraction* at all, but

rather, a direct *emanation* from the agent intellect:

For when the intellectual power sees the particular things which are in the

imagination, and when the light of the agent intellect in us . . . shines upon

them, they become abstracted from matter and its attachments, and are

imprinted on the rational soul, not in the sense that they themselves pass

from the imagination to our intellect, . . . but rather, in the sense that their

consideration prepares the soul so that what is abstract emanates upon it

from the agent intellect.30

Avicenna’s claim that knowledge is ultimately an emanation has

a number of important epistemological consequences, one of which

is his denial of intellectual memory. On the emanational account

of knowledge, intellectual understanding is nothing but the actual

existence of the object known in the knower. To think of some concept,

*c*, is simply for the form or quiddity of *c* to exist in one’s intellect.

Since the intellect is not a body which has spatial extension,

there is no “place” within the intellect in which an intelligible can

be actually stored while it is not consciously being thought. The

storehouse for intelligibles, then, is not in the soul, but rather, it is

the agent intellect itself, which is always engaged in the contemplation

of its own contents. Moreover, “conjunction” with the agent

intellect for Avicenna is not a special state through which the intellect

becomes immortal, but rather it is the foundation for all learning,

which is nothing but “the search for the perfect disposition for

conjunction.”31

Avicenna’s account of the agent intellect’s role in human understanding

also allows him to posit a form of prophecy that is properly

intellectual. Avicenna’s prophet is blessed with a strong capacity for

intuition (*h.*

*ads*), possessing what Avicenna calls a “holy intellect.”

Avicenna recognizes lesser forms of intuitive ability in which other

human beings share, by which they are occasionally able to receive

the agent intellect’s emanation without the prior aid of the sense

faculties or the help of a human teacher. But the prophet’s intuition

is unique. For him intuition does not come in episodic flashes;

rather, he receives *all* intelligibles from the agent intellect in a single

instant. Nor is the prophet lacking in *comprehension* of the intelligible

truths that he receives in this way, since they are already

rationally ordered and logically arranged insofar as they include the

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middle terms of the syllogisms that demonstrate their truth. For

Avicenna, then, the prophet is special not merely in virtue of the

bodily faculty of imagination, as was the case for al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, but in

virtue of the special qualities of his immaterial intellect as well.32

Of all the Arabic philosophers, it is Averroes for whom the ontological

status of the material or potential intellect and its relation

to the individual causes the most vexation. In his three commentaries

on the *De Anima* and in related minor works, written at various

times over the course of his life, Averroes struggled to make

sense of Aristotle’s account of the potential intellect in *De Anima*,

III.4, changing his interpretation of the text many times.33 Averroes’

task was complicated by the competing theories of his predecessors,

the Greek commentators Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius,

who represented polar opposites on the question of the intellect’s

ontological status. At issue for Averroes was the basic question of

how to interpret Aristotle’s claim that the potential intellect must

be unmixed with matter in order to acquire knowledge of intelligible

universals. What exactly does it mean for the intellect to be

“unmixed,” and how does this affect the intellect’s relation to a

human being, whose individuality is a function of matter?

Averroes’ first position on the material intellect is represented in

the original version of his *Epitome of the “De Anima,”* a work that

Averroes reworked at least twice to bring it in line with his changing

views. This position, which is closest to that of Alexander, may

loosely be termed “materialist.” On this view, the material intellect

is a special disposition for receiving intelligibles unique to the

human imagination, or more precisely, “the disposition which is

in the imaginative forms for receiving the intelligibles.” Since the

imagination is a faculty of the soul, and its contents have spiritual

or intentional rather than physical being, Averroes believes at this

stage in his thinking that such a position meets Aristotle’s fundamental

criterion that the intellect is neither a body “nor material in

the way that corporeal forms are material.”34

This solution did not satisfy Averroes for long. In his later writings,

in particular his *Long Commentary on the “De Anima”* (which

survives only in its medieval Latin version), Averroes moves closer

to the position of Themistius, now arguing that the material intellect

can be “neither a body nor a power in a body.” But Averroes adds

a further qualification to his account that sets it radically apart from

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the views of all his predecessors. For he reasons that if the material

intellect is entirely separate from matter and incorporeal, then

it cannot be *individuated* by the body as Avicenna held, or as Averroes

puts it, “numbered according to the numeration of individual

humans.” The result, then, isAverroes’ much maligned position that

has come to be known as the “unicity of the intellect” or, less felicitously,

“monopsychism,” according to which the material intellect,

as well as the agent intellect, is a separate substance and one for all

human knowers.35

While this position is a sharp departure from Averroes’ earlier

view on the metaphysical status of the material intellect, it is noteworthy

that it shares with that view the recognition that human

thought is individuated by the images that accompany universal

thoughts, according to Aristotle’s dictum in the *De Anima* that the

soul never thinks without an image. Moreover, neither Averroes’

original materialism, nor the unicity of the intellect, allow for individual

immortality. Thus while Averroes allows for the possibility

of conjunction with the agent intellect, like al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı before him it

remains an intellectual ideal that has little bearing upon the traditional

belief in personal survival after death.36

the soul as a principle of motion: appetite

and practical intellect

The Arabic philosophers did not entirely neglect Aristotle’s observation

that the soul is a principle of motion as well as cognition, but

they focused most of their attention on the cognitive faculties of the

soul. The Arabic Aristotelians treat appetite as a byproduct of cognition

that arises when an object is perceived by either sense or intellect

as worthy of pursuit or avoidance. The principle that appetite follows

upon perception was applied with equal rigor in the intellectual as

well as the sensible realm. Perhaps the most important consequence

of this is that Arabic philosophers lack a strong conception of the

will, understood as an autonomous rational faculty able to resist the

dictates of the intellect. Rather, in the Arabic tradition “will” (*ira¯da*)

is a generic termfor all appetites, having roughly the same extension

as Aristotle’s conception of the voluntary, which applies to animals

and children as well as to adult humans. The peculiar appetitive

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faculty associated with the intellect in Arabic philosophy is not will

but “choice” (*ikhtiya¯ r*, equivalent to the Greek *prohaireˆsis*), that is,

the ability to decide between alternative courses of action and to

base one’s choices on a process of rational deliberation.37

The Arabic philosophers do not worry whether this view compromises

human freedom or moral responsibility. Morality for them

is primarily a matter of the interaction between the practical intellect

and the lower sense appetites. For Avicenna the practical intellect

cooperates with the estimative and cogitative faculties on the

one hand, and the theoretical intellect on the other, to engage in

moral deliberation and practical reasoning, and to produce generalized

ethical principles and rules of conduct. Virtue and vice are

thus functions of the practical intellect’s success at governing the

body. To the extent that the practical intellect is able to control

and direct the lower appetites, the agent is virtuous, and to the

extent that it fails to dominate, the agent is vicious.38 Although the

practical intellect is thus essential to human morality, it is consistently

subordinated to the theoretical intellect in the Arabic tradition.

Nowhere is this attitude better captured than in Averroes’

*Epitome of the “De Anima,”* where he observes that human rationality

in most cases never reaches beyond the capacities of the practical

intellect: “This power is a power common to all people who

are not lacking in humanity, and people only differ in it by degrees.

As for the second power [the theoretical intellect], it is clear from

its nature that it is very divine and found only in some people,

who are the ones primarily intended by Divine Providence over this

species.”39

notes

1 For the Greek background, see Davidson [208], 3–43; Peters [61], 40–7.

2 For a theological critique of the philosophers, see al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı [111], 212–

29.

3 Aristotle, *De Anima*, II.1, 412a27–8; 412b4–6; 413a4–6. The Greek term

*entelecheia*, “actuality,” was rendered into Arabic as *istikma¯ l*, “perfection.”

4 For an excellent account of al-R¯az¯ı’s psychology, see Druart [209].

5 Al-R¯az¯ı’s works containing the myth are lost, and known only by the

reports of his critics. For a translation of one report, see Pines [198],

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68–9. See further L. E. Goodman, “Razi’s Myth of the Fall of the Soul,”

in Hourani [25], 25–40.

6 Avicenna, *Avicenna’s “De Anima”: Being the Psychological Part of*

*Kita¯b al-shifa¯* ’, ed. F. Rahman (Oxford: 1959), bk. 1, ch. 1, 5–11.

7 See Marmura [214] for a translation of the three versions of the argument.

8 *Avicenna’s “De Anima,”* bk. 1, ch. 1, 15–16.

9 Ibid., bk. 5, chs. 3–4. For an English translation of the shorter version of

these arguments in Avicenna’s *al-Naja¯ t* (*The Salvation*), see Avicenna

[205], chs. 12–13. On this topic see also Druart [89] and Druart [210].

10 *De Anima*, II.12, 424a17–19; cf. *De Anima*, III.4, 429a15–18.

11 See R. M. Frank, “*Al-Ma‘na´* : Some Reflections on the Technical Meanings

of the Term in Kal¯am and its Use in the Physics of Mu‘ammar,”

*Journal of the American Oriental Society* 87 (1967), 248–59.

12 Avicenna, *al-Shifa¯ ’: al-‘iba¯ ra* (*The Healing: On Interpretation*), ed. M.

El-Khodeiri and I. Madkour (Cairo: 1970), 2–3.

13 A precursor to Avicenna’s notion of mental existence can be found in al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı [211], §21, 17–18: “When [the intelligibles] become intelligibles

in actuality, they become, then, one of the things existing in the world,

and they are counted, insofar as they are intelligibles, among the totality

of existing things.” English trans. in Hyman and Walsh [26], 216.

14 Averroes [135], bk. 3, comment 5, 400–1; English trans. in Hyman and

Walsh [26], 327–8.

15 *Avicenna’s “De Anima,”* bk. 2, ch. 2, 58–67; English version inAvicenna

[205], ch. 7, 38–40.

16 See Wolfson [217], for a comprehensive though dated account.

17 Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s most complete discussion of the imagination is in Walzer

[77], ch. 10, 162–3, and ch. 14, 210–27.

18 This example is given by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı in the *Attainment of Happiness*: see

*Alfarabi’s Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. M. Mahdi (Ithaca,

NY: 1962), 45.

19 On the topic of *wahm* see Black [207], and D. L. Black, “Estimation and

Imagination: Western Divergences from an Arabic Paradigm,” *Topoi* 19

(2000), 59–75.

20 *De Anima*, II.6, 418a20–5.

21 Avicenna’s basic account of the internal senses is given in *Avicenna’s*

*“De anima,”* bk. 1, ch. 5, 43–5, English version in Avicenna [205], 30–1.

The theory is developed in greater detail in bk. 4, chs. 1–3.

22 Averroes, *Taha¯ fut al-taha¯ fut*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut: 1930), 546–7;

English trans. at Averroes [140], vol. I, 336.

23 *Talkh¯ıs.*

*kita¯b al-nafs* (*Epitome of the “De Anima”*), ed. A. F. Al-Ahwani

(Cairo: 1950), 24; *Talkh¯ıs.*

*kit ¯ ab al-h. iss wa al-mah.*

*su¯ s* (*Epitome of “On*

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*Sense and Sense-Objects”*), ed. H. Blumberg (Cambridge, MA: 1972),

23–24; *Epitome of “Parva Naturalia,”* trans. H. Blumberg (Cambridge,

MA: 1961), 15–16. For *Talkh¯ıs.*

*kita¯b al-nafs* see also A. Ivry, “Averroes’

*Short Commentary* on Aristotle’s *De Anima*,” *Documenti e studi sulla*

*tradizione filosofica medievale* 8 (1997), 511–52.

24 *Talkh¯ıs.*

*kita¯b al-h. iss*, bk. 2, 29–35, and bk. 3, 42–3; *Epitome of “Parva*

*Naturalia,”* 18–21 and 26–7.

25 R. J. McCarthy, “Al-Kind¯ı’s Treatise on Intellect,” *Islamic Studies* 3

(1964), 119–49; al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı [211].

26 For Avicenna’s version see *Avicenna’s “De Anima,”* bk. 1, ch. 5,

48–50; *Avicenna’s Psychology*, ch. 5, 33–5. The references are scattered

throughout Averroes’ various commentaries, for example, *Talkh¯ıs.*

*kita¯b*

*al-nafs*, 85–6, 89–90.

27 See McCarthy, “Al-Kind¯ı’s Treatise on Intellect,” 130–1, 142; Jolivet

[69], 12–13, for the textual difficulties surrounding the term “second

intellect.”

28 *De Anima*, III.5, 430a24–5.

29 Averroes [135], bk. 3, Comment 36, 481; Davidson [208], 70–3. See also

above, chapter 4.

30 *Avicenna’s “De Anima,”* bk. 5, ch. 5, 235. For an alternative interpretation

of Avicenna’s views on abstraction, see D. Hasse, “Avicenna on

Abstraction,” in Wisnovsky [104], 39–72.

31 *Avicenna’s “De Anima,”* bk. 5, ch. 6, 244–8.

32 Ibid., 248–50. On intuition see Gutas [93], 159–77, and the further

discussion in “Intuition and Thinking: The Evolving Structure

of Avicenna’s Epistemology,” in Wisnovsky [104], 1–38. On

prophecy in Avicenna see M. E. Marmura, “Avicenna’s Psychological

Proof of Prophecy,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 22 (1963),

49–56. See further F. Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam* (Oxford: 1958;

repr. Chicago: 1979).

33 For the evolution ofAverroes’ views, seeDavidson [208], 258–314. There

is some dispute as to the chronological relation between Averroes’ long

and middle commentaries. See H. A. Davidson, “The Relation between

Averroes’ Middle and Long Commentaries on the *De Anima*,” *Arabic*

*Sciences and Philosophy* 7 (1997), 139–51, and A. Ivry, “Averroes’

Three Commentaries on *De Anima*,” in Aertsen and Endress [134],

199–216, for the competing views.

34 Averroes, *Talkh¯ıs.*

*kita¯b al-nafs*, 86.

35 Averroes [135], bk. 3, Comment 5, 401–9; English trans. in Hyman and

Walsh [26], 324–34. See further D. L. Black, “Memory, Time and Individuals

in Averroes’s Psychology,” *Medieval Theology and Philosophy*

5 (1996), 161–87, and Hyman [143].

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36 For Averroes on conjunction with the agent intellect, see A. Ivry, “Averroes

on Intellection and Conjunction,” *Journal of the American Oriental*

*Society* 86 (1966), 76–85, Black [206], and Averroes [204].

37 See, for example, Walzer [77], ch. 10, 165, 171–3, and ch. 13, 203–11.

38 *Avicenna’s “De Anima,”* bk. 1, ch. 5, 46–8; Avicenna [205], ch. 4, 32–3.

39 *Talkh¯ıs.*

*kita¯b al-nafs*, 69. See further A. Ivry, “TheWill of God and Practical

Intellect of Man in Averroes’ Philosophy,” *Israel Oriental Studies*

9 (1979), 377–91.

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16 Metaphysics

Metaphysics, first philosophy, or divine science has always been

a subject of controversy. Too often medieval Arabic metaphysics

is regarded as either simply a paraphrase of or a commentary on

Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, or a curious and rather unsuccessful blend

of Aristotelian metaphysics and Neoplatonism. Cristina D’Ancona

has shown the superficiality of this latter approach by highlighting

how carefully and creatively the “*fala¯ sifa*” or Hellenizing philosophers

used the various Greek sources, such as the works of Aristotle,

the *Plotiniana Arabica* (a group of texts based on Plotinus and including

the so-called Aristotle’s *Theology* derived from *Enneads* IV–VI),

and the *Liber de Causis*, adapted from Proclus’ *Theology* and known

in Arabic as *The Book of the Pure Good*.1 Yet Greek sources are not

enough to explain some developments. In 1979 Richard Frank argued

that *falsafa* (the Arabic transliteration of the Greek term for philosophy,

highlighting its foreign origin) is not immune to the influence

of *kala¯m*or Islamic theology,which had elaborated an ontology of its

own.2 More recently, though controversially, he has argued that even

al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, the famous author of the *Incoherence of the Philosophers*

and the staunch protector of orthodox Sunn¯ı Islam, is himself deeply

influenced by Avicenna.3

The *fala¯ sifa*, too, confused the issues, because some of them, al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı, Ibn T.

ufayl, and Averroes in particular, claim that there is

one philosophical truth reflected in a plurality of simultaneously

true religions. “True religions” simply translate into symbolic and,

therefore, culturally determined languages what the philosophers

know through demonstrations. Such a claim, whether or not it is

purely rhetorical, implies that the great philosophers hold basically

the same philosophical tenets and that philosophy reached its peak

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with Aristotle. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı offers a striking example of this attitude in

his *The Harmonization of the Two Opinions of the Two Sages: Plato*

*the Divine and Aristotle*.4 This text illustrates the old Alexandrian

tradition that profoundly influenced the *fala¯ sifa*. Its introduction

states its aims:

I see most of the people of our time delving into and disputing over whether

the world is generated or eternal. They claim that there is disagreement

between the two eminent and distinguished sages, Plato and Aristotle, concerning

the proof [of the existence] of the first Creator; the causes existing

due to Him; the issue of the soul and the intellect; recompense for good

and evil actions; and many political, moral, and logical issues. So I want to

embark in this treatise of mine upon a harmonization of the two opinions

of both of them and an explanation of what the tenor of their arguments signifies

in order to make the agreement between the beliefs of both apparent,

to remove doubt and suspicion from the hearts of those who look into their

books, and to explain the places of uncertainty and the sources of doubt in

their treatises.5

Besides the confusion arising from this mix of Aristotelianism

and Neoplatonism, there is another source of problems. The *fala¯ sifa*

moved from identifying metaphysics solely with some kind of natural

theology and, therefore, as amore sophisticated formof *kala¯m*, to

taking into account ontology, i.e., metaphysics, as primarily a study

of being qua being. Dimitri Gutas and more recently Amos Bertolacci

have highlighted this turning point6 by a careful study of Avicenna’s

famous *Autobiography*.7 In it Avicenna explains that though he read

Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* forty times and knew it by heart, its content

baffled him so much that he gave it up. One day at the book

market, by a fluke he was offered at a discount a small treatise by

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı explaining the purpose of the *Metaphysics*. He bought it

and understood then that its main aim was not the study of God.

Let us, therefore, retrace some important steps in this development

focusing on the subject matter of metaphysics and on the explanation

of causal relationships that are at the core of, for example, the

famous dispute between most of the *fala¯ sifa* who claim that the

world is eternal, and the theologians who defend creation in time.

al-kind￣ı

In his*OnFirst Philosophy*, ofwhich sadly only the first part is extant,

al-Kind¯ı spells out his conception of philosophy:

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Indeed, the human art which is highest in degree and most noble in rank

is the art of philosophy, the definition of which is knowledge of the true

nature of things, insofar as is possible for man. The aim of the philosopher

is, as regards his knowledge, to attain the truth, and as regards his action, to

act truthfully . . . We do not find the truth we are seeking without finding a

cause; the cause of the existence and continuance of everything is the True

One, in that each thing which has being has truth. The True One exists

necessarily, and therefore beings exist.8

This passage clearly shows how al-Kind¯ı immediately moves from

philosophy as knowledge of the true nature of things to knowledge

of the cause of both the existence and the continuance of everything.

This cause is equated with the True One, i.e., God, since the “True”

is one of the Qur’ ¯anic beautiful names of God. Philosophy aims at

discovering the existence of God as cause and then at explaining

how he creates and maintains everything in existence. As al-Kind¯ı

claimsa few paragraphs later that Aristotle is the mosteminent of the

Greek philosophers, we may wonder how he derives his conception

of philosophy from Aristotle’s texts. Amos Bertolacci and Cristina

D’Ancona provide some clues toward an answer.9

Al-Kind¯ı only draws on book II and on book XII, chapters 6–10

of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, which he supplements with references

to the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Topics*.10 Modern scholars have

neglected book II since it had been generally considered inauthentic,

and even if book II is authentic there are reasons not to consider it

part of the *Metaphysics*. In the Arabic tradition, book II is extremely

important because it was only much later that just part of book I

made it into Arabic and that part was located after book II. Book

II, therefore, becomes the official introduction to the whole book.

The end of its first chapter includes one of the very few references

in Aristotle to a cause of existence. Comparing it with the passage

of al-Kind¯ı I have just quoted shows how much book II influenced

al-Kind¯ı’s conception of philosophy:

It is right also that philosophy should be called knowledge of the truth. For

the end of theoretical knowledge is truth, while that of practical knowledge

is action . . . Now we do not know a truth without its cause; and a thing

has quality in a higher degree than other things if in virtue of it the similar

quality belongs to the other things . . . so that that which causes derivative

truths to be true is most true. Therefore the principles of eternal things must

be always most true; for they are not merely sometimes true, nor is there

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any cause of their being, but they themselves are the cause of the being of

other things.11

Putting aside other differences, I want to emphasize that al-Kind¯ı

speaks of creation and maintenance in existence.12 For himGod does

not simply grant an initial existence that keeps subsisting for as

long as it can; he also maintains it in existence. Al-Kind¯ı envisions

continuous creation and the utter contingency of all that is created,

whereas human agents may build a house that will survive them. As

the second chapter of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, book II, argues against

an infinite regress in material, formal, efficient, and final causes as

well as against an infinite variety of kinds of causes, the issue of

causation assumes great importance.

The other passage of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* that plays some role

in al-Kind¯ı’s *On First Philosophy* is book XII, chapters 6–10, which

establishes the existence and attributes of the Prime Mover, conceived

as a final cause. The conception of causation in those chapters

is much more limited than the one sketched in book II, and it is left

to philosophers in Islamic lands to resolve the differences.

The group of translators who worked around al-Kind¯ı produced

and were influenced by the *Plotiniana Arabica*. This influence

explains why al-Kind¯ı abandons much of Aristotle’s conception

of the Prime Mover, giving less importance to the second part of

book XII than to book II. God is uncaused and without accident or

substrate. He is eternal, incorruptible, and immutable. Chapter 3

establishes the existence of a first cause after complex disquisitions

on unity and plurality. The first cause totally transcends any formof

plurality and is perfectly one and simple. It is, therefore, neither soul

nor intellect. Aristotle’s Prime Mover was an intellect, but al-Kind¯ı,

following Plotinus, posits that the One is beyond soul and intellect.

It is also beyond the categories, and therefore cannot be said to be a

substance.

This insistence on God’s oneness is another way to link philosophy

to Islamic theology, since the latter is known not only as *kala¯m*,

but also as the “Science of Unification” (*‘ilm al-tawh. ¯ıd*), i.e., the

proclamation of God’s oneness, emphasizing monotheism and rejection

of any Trinitarian conception. In the introduction of *On First*

*Philosophy* al-Kind¯ı defends *falsafa* against some religious people,

insisting that truth should be accepted wherever it comes from. He

clearly means some theologians whose ignorance of logic does not

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allow them proper understanding of the Greek heritage. Al-Kind¯ı is

scathing:

[They are strangers to the truth] also due to the dirty envy which controls

their animal souls and which, by darkening its veils, obscures their thought’s

perception from the light of truth; and due to their considering those with

human virtue – in attainment ofwhich they are deficient, being on its remote

fringes – as audacious, harmful opponents; thereby defending their spurious

thrones which they installed undeservedly for the purpose of gaining leadership

and traffic in religion, though they are devoid of religion. For one who

trades in something sells it, and he who sells something does not have it.

Thus one who trades in religion does not have religion, and it is right that

one who resists the acquisition of knowledge of the real nature of things and

calls it unbelief be divested of [the offices of] religion. (Arabic 15, English

trans. 58–9)

As Adamson has shown, despite the vehemence of the attack, al-

Kind¯ı articulates his positions on divine attributes, creation, and

freedom through a creative adaptation or reaction to the main tenets

of one school of theology, the Mu‘tazilites.13 For instance, al-Kind¯ı

defends creation in time against the Aristotelian tenet of its eternity

not only in using arguments from the Christian Aristotelian commentator

John Philoponus, but also in stating the *kala¯m* view that

even non-being is a “thing.”14

In another text, the very brief *The Agent in the Proper Sense,*

*Being First and Perfect, and the Agent in the Metaphorical Sense,*

*Being Imperfect*, al-Kind¯ı tries to spell out how God’s agency transcends

that of creatures. True agency implies bringing into existence

from utter non-being, and this alone belongs to God. Besides, any

other so-called agent is acting under the influence of a superior agent.

Only God is a pure agent and a creature can only be called an agent

metaphorically, since it cannot bring existence from nothing and

depends on a superior cause for the exercise of its own causation.

There are two types of such metaphorical agency: (1) the cause is

simultaneous with its effect, for example, walking; (2) the effect

subsists after the cause ceases to produce the effect, for example, the

products of crafts, such as house building.15 Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ıwill adopt the

view that only God is an agent and Avicenna will use the distinction

between the two types of metaphorical agency in order to differentiate

physical causes from metaphysical ones.

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al-ra￣ zı￣

Al-R¯az¯ı, who is sometimes better known as a physician than as a

philosopher, shows that *falsafa* included a great diversity of views.

An independent thinker, he holds the religiously unorthodox view

that revelation is impossible, because it is always addressed to a particular

people at a particular time and, therefore, incompatible with

God’s justice since it excludes other peoples and other times. His

metaphysics is strikingly different from that of other *fala¯ sifa*. First,

he is very critical of Aristotle and in particular rejects his conception

of nature, which he finds anthropomorphic. He therefore abandons

some of Aristotle’s views on causes. He prefers Plato, whom

he knows at least through the Arabic version of Galen’s summary

of the *Timaeus*. Second, he is influenced by the *Plotiniana Arabica*

and some form of Gnosticism.

As we know his metaphysical views almost exclusively through

hostile reports, we are not sure how he defended them. For himthere

are five eternal beings: God, Soul, time, space, and matter. Originally

these five coexisted and there was no motion. Soul succumbed to a

passionate desire to get enmeshed in matter and in so doing introduced

motion, but of a disorderly kind. God, being merciful, took

pity on Soul and the world. Endowing Soul with intellect he enabled

it to realize its mistake and to organize the disorderly motion. Al-

R¯az¯ı certainly does not accept creation out of nothing and in time,

as does al-Kind¯ı. His metaphysics seems to limit itself to a natural

theology superseding the false claims of any revealed religion. Very

conscious of the cultural and religious diversity of the Islamic empire

and desirous of a common set of moral values, al-R¯az¯ı will use his

metaphysical conception of God’s three main attributes of compassion,

justice, and intellect to develop a detailed normative ethics.

Al-R¯az¯ı defends his conception of philosophy and develops his normative

ethics in his short but fascinating autobiography, *The Book*

*of the Philosophic Life*.16

al-fa￣ ra￣ bı￣

*Al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯’s understanding of Aristotle’s* Metaphysics

As we saw above, in his autobiography Avicenna says he understood

the *Metaphysics* properly only after reading al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s *Treatise on*

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*the Aims of Aristotle’s “Metaphysics”*, most likely because he then

realized that the work is primarily about being qua being and only

incidentally about natural theology.17 Yetwe still do not know much

about al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s metaphysics, and its interpretation is very disputed.

How and when al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı himself discovered that the subject matter

of metaphysics is being qua being we do not know. Neither do we

have much in the way of chronological indications to trace a possible

intellectual development. What we do know is that at some stage

he used a much more complete translation of the *Metaphysics* than

al-Kind¯ı, missing only the beginning of book I, book XI – in fact a

collection of duplicates of other passages – and parts of books XIII

and XIV.His early training was probably in a more syncretic approach

to philosophy, but painstakingly reading Aristotle’s own texts made

himmore aware of the true content of Aristotle’s metaphysical enterprise,

as the introduction of the *Aims* shows:

Our intention in this treatise is to indicate the purpose contained in the

book by Aristotle known as *Metaphysics* and the primary divisions which

it has, since many people have the preconceived notion that the import and

contents of this book consists of a treatment of the Creator, the intellect,

the soul, and other related topics, and that the science of metaphysics and

Islamic theology are one and the same thing . . . The primary object of this

science is absolute being and what is equivalent to it inuniversality, namely,

the one.18

One remarkable feature of this passage is al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s way of singling

out “one” from among all the transcendentals. This allows him to

integrate Neoplatonic traits in his own conception of metaphysics

despite his understanding of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and his doubts

about the authenticity of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*.19

*Al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯’s conception of metaphysics*

When purporting to present Aristotle’s own views, as in *The Philosophy*

*of Aristotle*, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı is careful not to include Neoplatonic

features, such as emanationism, but raises questions Aristotle did

not answer. Where do material forms and matter come from? Is the

agent intellect a cause of existence? He finally states that “we do not

possess metaphysical science.” Not surprisingly this sentence has

puzzled Farabian scholars, since al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı had access to an Arabic

translation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Muhsin Mahdi and others

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interpret it as al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s way of hinting that no metaphysics is possible

and that the texts in which he uses emanation are simply a sop

to placate religious authorities.20 Yet I think that this is al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s

polite way of pointing to the inadequacies and the incompleteness

of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.

In texts inwhich al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı lays down his program for philosophical

education, such as the *Enumeration of the Sciences*, he explains that

metaphysics has three parts. The first one studies beings qua beings;

the second studies the principles of the theoretical sciences, such as

logic and mathematics; the third studies beings that are neither bodies

nor in bodies and discovers that they form a hierarchy leading to

the First or One, which gives existence, unity, and truth to all other

beings. It also shows how all other beings proceed from the One. Al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı grants one line to the first part, probably because Aristotle has

already successfully formulated this part of the science, but one paragraph

to the second part explaining the origin of the first intelligibles

of each science, and two pages to the third, perhaps because Aristotle

said little about these issues. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı suggests ways of realizing an

ascent to all immaterial principles followed by a descent explaining

how everything arises from these principles. The presentation of the

third part shows that al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı has abandoned al-Kind¯ı’s view of the

One as beyond being and intellect, and that he equates some features

of Aristotle’s Prime Mover who is an intellect with those of the Neoplatonic

One. He also distinguishes the First or God from the agent

intellect. As the First knows only itself, emanation is necessary and

eternally gives rise to the world. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı intends to tidy up all the

unresolved questions of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and to develop its

theological teaching.

The systematization process reaches its peak in *The Political*

*Regime*, also known as *The Principles of the Beings*. This text, in

which al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı speaks in his own name, begins by stating that there

are six hierarchical kinds of principles that explain the subsistence

of bodies and their accidents: the First Cause, the secondary causes,

the agent intellect, the soul, form, and matter. He then treats of each,

beginningwith the First and its attributes and explaining how it gives

rise by emanation to the secondary causes or intelligences, which

themselves give rise to the celestial spheres and the agent intellect.

The agent intellect is a giver of forms: it emanates intelligibles. The

motion common to all celestial bodies gives rise to prime matter, and

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their individual motions give rise to all the material forms in succession,

beginning with the four elements.We have here a realization of

the descent and a derivation of both material and intelligible forms

as well as matter, from higher causes, through emanation. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı

does not confuse Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism; nor does he

philosophically reject the latter inhis esoteric teaching while using it

as religious camouflage in more popular writings; rather he attempts

to complete metaphysics as he understands it.

*Al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯ and first intelligibles*

In his numerous works on logic, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı often speaks of first intelligibles,

which are common to all human beings and are the ultimate

principles of the various disciplines. The study of such principles

belongs not to logic but rather to metaphysics, since such intelligibles

are not acquired from experience.We saw earlier that this constitutes

the second part of metaphysics. In *TheOpinions of the People of*

*the VirtuousCity*, another emanationist text, al-F ¯ ar¯ab¯ı indicates that

such intelligibles are of three kinds: technical, ethical,21 and theoretical.

The agent intellect emanates them as conditions for the intelligibility

of experience. Here again, since al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı admits intelligibles

that are not derived from experience and whose origin Aristotle

did not explain, he needs to turn to emanation to explain their

existence. Interestingly, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı will derive the first principles of

medicine and astronomy from prophecy, arguing that they cannot be

derived from experience. In the *Long Commentary on the “De Interpretatione*,”

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı scathingly attacks the theologians who deny

human freedom, i.e., the Ash‘arites, and claims that human freedom

is a first intelligible.22 Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı also thinks that even the intelligibles

derived from experience and subsumed under the categories

need to be grounded through emanation from the agent intellect.

*Al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯ and the categories*

One of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s most puzzling texts is the *Book of Letters*.23 Its

title has sometimes been understood as referring to metaphysics

since the various books of the *Metaphysics* are indicated in both

Greek and Arabic by the name of letters. Yet instead of focusing on

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the *Metaphysics*, this text quotes extensively from the *Categories*

and pays much more attention to interrogative particles – the Arabic

word used for letter also means particle – that are linked to the categories,

such as the category of time or “when.” Aristotle studied the

categories not only in the*Categories*, but also (though very briefly) in

the *Metaphysics*, and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı wants to give a metaphysical grounding

to the logical categories. In the *Book of Letters* al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı indicates

that the categories are the ten *summa genera* of intelligibles referring

to objects of sense perception. Section V, numbers 11–18 of this text

discusses the role of the categories in the different disciplines in the

order of the Alexandrian philosophical curriculum and in relation to

the various causes.

Mathematics deals with quantity, and though it disengages its

objects from their relation to sensible things it can account for its

objects without referring to anything outside the categories, since

quantities, though intelligible independently of their relation to sensible

and material things, can never exist without them. This study

limits itself to the formal cause. Physics, on the other hand, considers

the categories inasmuch as they are the species and genera of sensible

things and considers the four causes (formal, material, efficient,

and final), though limiting itself to causes that are not outside the

categories, i.e., excluding immaterial causes. Yet, at some stage, it

ascends to ultimate efficient causes and to the end for which those

things subject to the categories came to be. It then discovers that

the grounding of the categories is beyond the categories and realizes

that it has reached its own limits. That there are beings beyond the

categories is something that Aristotle did not say, and it smacks of

Neoplatonism. Let us not forget that al-Kind¯ı too had claimed that

God is beyond the categories. Metaphysics will of course deal with

causes and beings which are beyond the categories, since they are

immaterial, but also with sensible things inasmuch as such beings

outside the categories are the efficient and final causes of the sensible

individual things comprised by the categories.

The text implies that material things are subject to the four Aristotelian

causes and the categories, but that the quest for ultimate

causes will lead to the discovery of immaterial causes that are not

only final causes of motion as in Aristotle but also efficient causes

of existence, and that the physical and metaphysical kinds of causation

may be quite different. Avicenna will explicitly and deliberately

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make that move. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s metaphysics has not yet been studied

in depth, but there is no doubt that it begins to explore some of the

important ideas Avicenna highlights in *al-Shifa¯ ’* (*The Healing*): the

distinction between physical and metaphysical causes, and the need

to begin with Aristotle’s study of being qua being but then to move

to an ascent to causes beyond the categories, and from that to derive

the existence of all beings, material and immaterial.

avicenna

Thanks to al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, Avicenna discovered the subject matter of

Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, but also some of the problems Aristotle

had not resolved, tackled, or raised. Thinking through these issues

he centered his own metaphysics in the *Shifa¯ ’* on the distinction

between existence and essence. I have selected this text partly

because it was translated into Latin and had a great influence on

Western philosophy, but mostly because it is a masterpiece in its

own right.

*Being qua being and its concomitants*

At times it has been argued that Avicenna’s metaphysics makes of

existence an accident of essence. Fifty years ago Fazlur Rahman was

already disputing this interpretation, and I would like to emphasize

that for Avicenna the overt primary notion is being, not essence

(see also chapter 6, above, on this question). In book I, following

the Alexandrian tradition, Avicenna first establishes the aim of the

discipline, its rank, and its usefulness. He also asserts in I.2 that its

subject matter is being qua being and so it will need to study the relation

of “thing” and “being” to the categories (I.4). In the next chapter

he explains what he means by this mysterious “thing” by asserting

that there are three primary concepts: being, thing, and necessary (I.5,

first sentence).24 Priority is given to being and we should notice that

“one,” so important in both al-Kind¯ı and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, does not play

an immediate role. For the Neoplatonic one Avicenna substitutes

“thing,” an attribute of being not present in Aristotle. Where does

it come from? Recently both Robert Wisnovsky and I have argued

that this concept is borrowed from *kala¯m* and used by Avicenna to

ground his distinction between essence and existence.25 *Kala¯m* is in

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fact not simply a discipline philosophers outgrow and neglect, but

has become at least in part a source of inspiration. In both al-Kind¯ı

and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı the First Cause was already a cause of being, but its

oneness or simplicity was what distinguished it from other beings.

As Avicenna rejects the Neoplatonic primacy of oneness over being,

he needs now to find something else that would ground this distinction.

Strictly speaking, “thing” is not synonymous with essence, but

whatever is a thing has an essence or quiddity. In God there is no

distinction whatsoever between being and essence, but this distinction

applies to all other beings and explains their utter contingency.

Because for Avicenna there are two types of existence, concrete individual

existence outside themind and mental existence in themind,

even concepts or universals are things.26 This leads him to select

as his third primary notion a disjunctive attribute of being “necessary,”

since every being is either necessary, possible, or impossible.

Avicenna insists on the impossibility of determining which of these

modal concepts is prior, but will use them to establish his proof for

the existence of God. There is only one being, God, that is necessary

in itself. Any being other than God is possible in itself and as a

mere possible always enjoys mental existence in God’smind, though

it may become necessary through another when God creates it and

maintains it in concrete existence.

*The distinction between physical and metaphysical*

*efficient causes*

Avicenna integrates into the *Metaphysics* of the *Shifa¯ ’* al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯’s

point about the different approach to the categories in logic and

metaphysics, and devotes book II to substances, book III to some

of the accidents, and book IV to the relations between substance

and accidents. Book V completes the ontological foundation of

logic by examining universals and particulars as well as whole and

part.

The time has now come for Avicenna to move to a study of

the causes in order to provide a foundation for natural theology.

Avicenna’s conception of the four causes in metaphysics has finally

attracted the attention it deserves and we will refer in our discussion

to the excellent scholarship now available. Wishing to connect

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his examination of causes to the primacy of the concept of being,

Avicenna introduces book VI by remarking that cause and effect

are among the consequents of being qua being. Any being is either

uncaused and, thus, the universal cause of all other beings, or caused.

If caused, it may itself be a secondary cause of another, or it may be

purely passive and not endowed with any derivative causal power.

Chapter 1 gives a very technical presentation of the division of

the causes and their states. Avicenna indicates that by “agent” he

means a cause that bestows existence separate from itself and is not

simply a principle of motion. “The metaphysicians do not intend

by ‘the agent’ the principle of movement only, as do the natural

philosophers, but also the principle of existence and that which

bestows existence, such as the creator of the world.”27 In fact Avicenna

had already extensively studied such physical causes and principles

in the first book of the *Physics* of the *Shifa¯ ’*. But just as al-

Kind¯ı had required a cause not only of initial existence but also

of maintenance in existence, so Avicenna concludes this section

by claiming that “that which is caused requires some thing which

bestows existence upon it continuously, as long as it continues to

exist.”28

Very much aware that such a claimgoes far beyond Aristotle’s conception

of the causation of the Unmoved Mover, Avicenna demonstrates

in chapter 2 that every cause exists simultaneously with that

which is caused by it. According to Wisnovsky this reflects an earlier

distinction between immanent and transcendent causes going

back to the Neoplatonic commentators on Aristotle.29 Much attention

has been paid to this presentation of efficient causation, which

will introduce continuous creation to the West and be picked up,

for instance, by Duns Scotus in his distinction between essentially

and accidentally related causes.30 Avicenna carefully explains that

what people take to be true agents, e.g., the builder for the house,

the father for the child, and fire for burning, are causes neither of the

subsistence of their effects nor even of their existence. They simply

are accidental or supporting causes that precede the existence

of the effect and can constitute an infinite series. The real agents

are transcendent and immaterial causes, finite in number, which are

simultaneous with their effect and act on the sublunary world by

means of the agent intellect who is the bestower of forms. The true

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agent is always prior in essence to its effect even if it is not prior to

it in time, since for Avicenna creation is an eternal process that does

not require pre-existing matter, whereas an accidental agent is prior

in time to the effect and requires matter to act. A true agent is also

superior to its effect, while the accidental agent may be of the same

species. The father who is an instrumental cause for the existence of

the child is a human being too, but the child’s very existence comes

through a form bestowed by the agent intellect, the tenth pure intelligence.

In this way the universe proceeds indirectly but necessarily

from the First by emanation as do all the intelligences, except the

first one that proceeds immediately from the First. *Pace* al-Kind¯ı,

the First is an intellect, but to avoid his considering lower realities

this intellect knows only universals. His causation does not require

choice or will.

*The priority of the final cause and the distinction*

*between “being” and “thing”*

In his analysis of the relations between the various types of causes

Avicenna insists on the supremacy of the final cause over the others

and, therefore, combines the Neoplatonic insistence on the First as

efficient cause with Aristotle’s emphasis on the importance of the

final cause. But if the First is both an efficient and a final cause, does

not this introduce some multiplicity in the One? Wisnovsky has

shown how Avicenna solves this problem by means of the distinction

between “being” and “thing.”31 Since in every creature essence

is distinct from existence, the First is its efficient cause in relation

to its being, but its final cause in relation to its thingness. So the

distinction between the efficient and final causation of the First

is simply relative to the creature and its constitutive composition

of essence and existence. This aspect has escaped most commentators

because the medieval Latin translation substituted “causality”

(*causalitas*) for “thingness,” a concept unknown to the translator

who probably assumed it was a paleographical error. Indeed, the First

ultimately bestows on creatures both their existence and whatever

limited causal power they may have, but it is qua efficient cause that

the First bestows such causal power and not qua final cause, as the

Latin assumes. Besides, according to Wisnovsky, the universe proceeds

from the First as efficient cause (bk. IX.1–6) but its reversion

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or return by attaining its perfection (bk. IX.7 and X.1) originates from

the First as final cause.

*The material and the formal causes*

If Wisnovsky sheds further light on the First as final cause, Bertolacci

gives us for the first time an extensive treatment of material

and formal causes in Avicenna.32 Following Wisnovsky he shows

that the distinction between immanent causes, i.e., formand matter,

and transcendent causes, i.e., efficient and final causes, is more fluid

than generally thought. In fact Avicenna accepts Aristotle’s view of

the identity between formal and efficient causes in artificial production

and the identity between formal, efficient, and final causes

in some natural processes. Avicenna also admits that in the case of

material objects form is an intermediate between matter and the

prime cause of its existence and, therefore, has some efficacy. Even

matter, at least as subject, is a cause of existence and subsistence

for the accidents inhering in it, and therefore it too has some causal

efficacy.

Avicenna successfully accomplished the program that al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı

had laid down for metaphysics and grounded the whole enterprise

in being qua being and its concomitants “thing” and “necessary,” as

well as in one of its pair of consequents, cause and effect. The key to

the successful completion of this program in a unified and coherent

manner is Avicenna’s bold introduction of “thing,” an ontological

notion borrowed from *kala¯m*, in order to insure a real distinction

between essence and existence. This also allows himtohighlight, following

al-Kind¯ı though in a more muted way, the difference between

immaterial and material causation. Such a brilliant and original synthesis

gained popularity and insured the continuous influence of

Avicenna’s thought through the ages in Iran, where it would be combined

withS.

u¯ fismin the Philosophy of Illumination (see chapters 11

and 19). It is no surprise that Avicenna’s metaphysics, with its

sophisticated and complex understanding of causes, both worried

and attracted the theologian and S.

u¯ fı¯ al-Ghaza¯ lı¯, but angered Averroes

who saw it as an unhappy compromise between true philosophy

and religion and preached a strict return to pure Aristotelianism in a

kind of philosophical fundamentalism. Averroes claims that physics

proves the existence of God, and rejects most of emanationism, as

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well as the notion of necessary being, key to Avicenna’s metaphysical

proof of the existence of God.

al-ghaza￣ lı￣

Al-Ghaza¯ lı¯, famous for his attack against the *fala¯ sifa* in his *Incoherence*

*of the Philosophers*, shows great philosophical acumen and

may have been more influenced by *falsafa* than he wants to acknowledge.

In the tradition of al-R¯az¯ı andAvicenna he wrote an intellectual

autobiography, *al-Munqidh min al-dala¯ l*, often known in English

as *Deliverance from Error*.33 In response to a personal intellectual

and religious crisis, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı examines the four main categories

of truth seekers: the theologians, the philosophers, the B¯at.inites

(a Sh¯ı‘a group who look for privileged knowledge acquired from an

infallible Im¯am), and theS.

u¯ fı¯s. *Kala¯m* has lost much of its previous

prestige and al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı dismisses it fairly quickly, as intellectually

too limited and unsophisticated in its arguments. He also dismisses

the *fal ¯ asifa* and the B¯at.inites but promotesS.

u¯ fism.

His appraisal of philosophy, based on his previous work in the

*Incoherence*, is fairly nuanced and complex. He debunks al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s

claim that philosophers use demonstrative reasoning, as well as

his slogan that Plato and Aristotle basically said the same thing.

If the philosophers’ arguments were truly demonstrative they would

not disagree among themselves. Their disagreements divide them

roughly into three categories: (1) materialists who denied the existence

of the omniscient Creator; (2) naturalists who, impressed by

the marvels of nature, discovered the existence of the omniscient

creator, but reduced human beings to a mix of humors and ended

up denying the immateriality and immortality of the soul as well

as the possibility of resurrection; and (3) theists who accepted both

the existence of a knowing Creator and the immortality of the soul

and refuted the two previous groups. Yet even the theists disagree

among themselves, since Aristotle refuted Socrates and Plato. Their

disagreements are a sign of the weakness of their arguments. For

al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı the main proponents of *falsafa* and Aristotelianism are

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and Avicenna.

In a somewhat lengthy discussion al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı does not hesitate to

endorse both logic and mathematics, warning that rejecting them

in the name of religion would discredit Islam. But he also worries

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that the excellence of their proofs, which indeed are true demonstrations,

may mislead people into assuming that the other branches of

philosophy are as intellectually rigorous.His treatment of Aristotle’s

conception of physics and nature is extremely brief. It indicates that

much of what it studies is as valid and useful as the study of medicine

but ends with the same criticism as that of al-R¯az¯ı.34 The philosophers

endow nature, including the celestial bodies,with some kind of

agency, whereas no natural body or element is capable of any action

by itself or from itself. In other words, he too wants to maintain that

all natural things are purely passive and inert, but going further than

al-R¯az¯ı he will even deny causal efficacy to soul.

Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s treatment of metaphysics is more elaborate, though

it completely neglects any allusion to being qua being. First, he

gleefully indicates that the philosophers, being unable to provide

apodeictic arguments, ended up differing greatly and falling into

innumerable errors. Hence metaphysics gives rise to the three philosophical

claims that should be rejected as unbelief, that is to say,

the eternity of the world, the denial of God’s knowledge of particulars,

and the dismissal of corporeal rewards and punishments in the

afterlife. These three issues stem from the philosophers’ conception

of causation. For al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, at least as presented here, true agency

requiring both knowledge of particulars and will is God’s privilege.

There is only one agent, God, and all other beings are not endowed

even with a derivative causal power. He adds that on other topics

the metaphysicians did err, but not as seriously, and are close to one

school of *kala¯m*, theMu‘tazilites, who, though not orthodox, should

not be tarred as unbelievers. The sympathy al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı exhibits for

the Mu‘tazilites may explain why among the *fala¯ sifa* he singled out

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and Avicenna, but omitted al-Kind¯ı, a defender of creation

in time and known, as we have seen, for his Mu‘tazilite sympathies.

Whether al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı truly denies to all creatures any agency, even,

*pace* al-Kind¯ı, in a metaphorical sense, is disputed. Richard Frank has

argued that he does not and that under the influence of Avicenna he

even gave up being a strict Ash‘arite theologian, but Marmura has

rejected Frank’s interpretation (see above, chapter 7). What concerns

me here is not so much whether al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı did indeed abandon a

strict occasionalism typical of his school of *kala¯m*, but rather his

insistence that the core difference between the ontological commitments

of the *fala¯ sifa* and the theologians rests in their conception

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of causation and its implications. For al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı all the unorthodox

positions of themain *fala¯ sifa* derive fromtheir conception of agency,

as highlighted in the *Incoherence*.

*The* Incoherence

Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s purpose in this text is simply to show that contrary

to their boast the philosophers do not present genuinely demonstrative

arguments, particularly in metaphysics. He simply wants

to highlight the flaws in their arguments and he does not necessarily

endorse any tenet he uses to show such flaws. This makes it

difficult to assert what exactly al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı thinks on some of these

issues. Metaphysical questions occupy sixteen out of the twenty discussions

and precede the four discussions concerning the natural sciences.

There is no concern shown for being qua being; the focus is

natural theology. Why al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı adopts an order that is the reverse

of the traditional philosophical curriculum is not clear, but he may

have been more worried about the metaphysical conception of causation

than about the physical one. The metaphysical denies both

knowledge of particulars and will to God, and so according to him

makes nonsense of agency. Reversing al-Kind¯ı’s famous contention

that God alone is a true agent and creatures are agents only in a

metaphorical sense, al-Ghaza¯ lı¯ insists that the *fala¯ sifa* utterly fail to

make of God a true agent and attribute agency to himonly in a purely

metaphorical way. Therefore, “they have rendered his state approximating

that of the dead person who has no information of what

takes place in the world, differing from the dead, however, only inhis

self-awareness.”35

In order to preserve God’s oneness al-Kind¯ı had claimed that God

is not an intellect, and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and Avicenna, though granting intellect

to God, had denied his knowledge of particulars. Besides, God’s

action is necessary, and therefore they do not endow him with will

or choice or freedom. Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, on the other hand, defines the

agent as “one [‘man,’ a person] from whom the act proceeds together

with the will to act by way of choice and the knowledge of what is

willed” (III, n. 4), and in the first discussion he defines the will as “an

attribute whose function is to differentiate a thing from its similar,”

i.e., the ability to specify one of two or more indiscernibles (I, n. 41).

This ability is required to explain creation in time: since God has

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will and knowledge, he can specify one among several indiscernible

potential instants of time to “begin” his creation. Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, therefore,

highlights the contrast between voluntary agency and natural

causation:

If we suppose that a temporal event depends for its occurrence on two things,

one voluntary and the other not, the intellect relates the act to the voluntary.

The same goes for the way we speak. For if someone throws another in the

fire and [the latter] dies, one says that [the former], not the fire, is the killer.

(III, n. 13, trans. modified)

Whether or not al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı truly grants some agency to human beings

is dubious, but he certainly wishes to grant it fully to God. God’s

knowledge of particulars and his will and power ground creation

in time. This leads al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı to reject the Neoplatonic axiom that

“from the One only one comes” as totally unable to explain multiplicity.

In its name the philosophers had denied to God knowledge of

the particulars, though Avicenna endowed him with knowledge of

universals that would already compromise his simplicity according

to the philosophers’ own argument.

Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s philosophically sophisticated attacks on al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı

and Avicenna were enormously influential. Averroes took them so

seriously that he answered them one by one in his *Incoherence of*

*the Incoherence*. However, his careful reading of Aristotle led himto

abandon the emanationism that had been present in various forms

in al-Kind¯ı, al-R¯az¯ı, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, and Avicenna and to endorse a more

genuine Aristotelianism. How philosophy moved from the East of

the Islamic empire to theWest, and which exact texts of al-Kind¯ı, al-

R¯az¯ı, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, Avicenna, and al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı were available to Averroes

and his predecessors in Andalusia, is not always clear.

falsafa in andalusia

Ibn T.

ufayl, in his philosophical novel, bypasses Aristotle’s conception

of metaphysics by completely ignoring being qua being, but presenting

a purely rational assent to God leading to a natural mysticism

of which the various true religions are pale imitations. Rationalist

*falsafa* has abandoned the mantle of *kal ¯ am* and adopted a S.

u¯ fı¯ garb

(see chapter 8).

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On the other hand, Averroes, gradually provoked by al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s

criticisms and by closer and closer readings of Aristotle’s own texts,

vilifies Avicenna for corrupting *falsafa* and advocates with the zeal

of the convert a return to true Aristotelianism purified from Neoplatonismand

*kala¯m*accretions. Though the complex and confusing

story of Averroes’ various views on psychology and on the material

intellect in particular has been studied in detail (on these topics see

chapters 9 and 15 above), metaphysical questions have received little

attention.36 For the *Long Commentary on the “Metaphysics”*,

which probably presents Averroes’ final positions, we have a good

Arabic edition but no critical edition of the medieval Latin version.37

Charles Genequand provided a translation and study of book Lambda

or XII, making this the only part so far accessible in English.38 Averroes

considers that the subject matter of metaphysics is being qua

being, whose focal meaning is substance characterized by form. He

rejects emanationism, so that physics must establish by induction

the existence of the Prime Mover as efficient cause since metaphysics

is unable to ground it.39 Metaphysics simply shows that

this prime mover is also the formal and final cause of the world.

As Laurence Bauloye’s recent study of book Beta or III indicates,

Averroes leaves aside the distinction between essence and existence

and focuses on being as substance and form.40

Scholars of Greek philosophy are still trying to work out a satisfying

integration of various trends in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, particularly

between metaphysics as the study of the most universal, i.e.,

being qua being, and the study of God and other immaterial beings.

Islamic philosophers too wrestled with this issue. They either more

or less dropped the study of being qua being, as al-Kind¯ı, al-R¯az¯ı,

and Ibn T.

ufayl did, or they tried to integrate these trends in completing

Aristotle’s metaphysics. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı points to the difficulties

and inconsistencies and adumbrates an integration through Neoplatonic

influences. Avicenna reaches a full integration by rethinking

all the issues and also borrowing a newnotion, this time from*kala¯m*,

“thing.” Al-Ghaza¯ lı¯’s attacks against the *fala¯ sifa* and emanation in

particular, as well as the close reading required for paraphrases and

literal commentaries, awoke Averroes from his dogmatic slumber

and changed him into a reformist who preached a return to uncontaminated

Aristotelianism.

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notes

1 D’Ancona Costa [9]. See also P. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus:APhilosophical*

*Study of the “Theology of Aristotle”* (London: 2002).

2 Frank, R. M., “*Kala¯m* and Philosophy: A Perspective from One Problem,”

in Morewedge [31], 71–95.

3 Frank [108]. Reviewed in Marmura [118].

4 *L’harmonie entre les opinions de Platon et d’Aristote*, Arabic ed. F. M.

Najjar and French trans. D. Mallet (Damascus: 1999). English trans. by

C. E. Butterworth in Alfarabi [185], 115–67.

5 Trans. from Alfarabi [185], 125, with one modification.

6 Gutas [93] and Bertolacci [223].

7 Ed. and trans. Gohlman [91].

8 For the Arabic text see Al-Kind¯ı [71], vol. II, 1–133; English translations

are taken from Ivry [68], with this passage at 55.

9 See Bertolacci [222], and C. D’Ancona, “Al-Kind¯ı on the Subject-Matter

of the First Philosophy: Direct and Indirect Sources of *Falsafa al-u¯ la¯* ,

Chapter One,” in J. A. Aertsen and A. Speer (eds.), *Was ist Philosophie*

*imMittelalter?* (Berlin: 1998), 841–55.

10 On translations of the *Metaphysics* into Arabic, see A. Martin, “La

*M´ etaphysique*: tradition syriaque et arabe,” in Goulet [20], 528–34.

11 *Metaphysics*, 993b20–30, trans. W. D. Ross, *The Complete Works of*

*Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes (Princeton, NJ: 1984), vol. II, 1570.

12 On al-Kind¯ı’s metaphysics see Adamson [63].

13 Adamson [62].

14 For the dispute over whether non-being is a thing, see also above,

chapter 6.

15 Arabic 169–71; English translation inA. Altmann and S.M. Stern, *Isaac*

*Israeli* (Oxford: 1958), 68–9.

16 Abu¯ Bakr Muh. ammad ibn Zakariyya¯ al-Ra¯zı¯, *The Book of the Philosophic*

*Life*, trans. C. E. Butterworth, *Interpretation* 20 (1993), 227–36.

For further references to al-R¯az¯ı see above, chapter 13.

17 Ed. in F. Dieterici, *Alfa¯ ra¯bı¯s philosophische Abhandlungen* (Leiden:

1980). English trans. in Gutas [93].

18 Trans. Gutas [93], 240–2.

19 See Druart [74].

20 Mahdi [190], 201.

21 See T.-A. Druart, “Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı, Ethics, and First Intelligibles,” *Documenti*

*e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 8 (1997), 403–23.

22 For this work see Zimmermann [79].

23 *Alfarabi’s Book of Letters (Kita¯b al-Huru¯ f)*, ed.M.Mahdi (Beirut: 1969).

24 Marmura [227].

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25 Wisnovsky [231] and Druart [224]. Adamson [62] shows the importance

of “thing” in al-Kind¯ı’s conception of creation in time.

26 See Black [220].

27 Translation of VI.1 and 2 byA. Hyman in Hyman andWalsh [26], 247–55,

at 247.

28 Ibid., 251.

29 Wisnovsky [233].

30 See Marmura [226], Marmura [228], and Wisnovsky [232].

31 See Wisnovsky [105], Wisnovsky [233], and above, chapter 6.

32 See Bertolacci [221].

33 Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı [110], English translation in al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, *Deliverance from*

*Error*, ed. and trans. R. J. McCarthy (Boston: 1980).

34 For a diatribe against Aristotelian physical theory that has been ascribed

to al-Ra¯zı¯, see al-Ra¯zı¯, *Rasa¯ ’il falsafiyya*, ed. P. Kraus (Cairo: 1939),

116–34, with Italian translation and commentary in G. A. Lucchetta,

*La natura e la sfera: la scienza antica e le sue metafore nella critica di*

*Ra¯ zı¯* (Bari: 1987).

35 Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı [111], no. 58; further citations are to the English translation

in this edition.

36 On Averroes’ revisions of his positions and writings, see Druart [141].

37 For theArabic text seeAverroes, *Tafsı¯rma¯ ba‘d al-t.abı¯‘a*, ed.M. Bouyges

(Beirut: 1973).

38 Averroes [137].

39 On Averroes’ views on causation and emanationism, see Kogan [144].

40 Averroes, *Grand Commentaire (Tafs¯ır*) *de la “M´ etaphysique,” Livre*

*Bˆ eta*, intro. and trans. L. Bauloye (Paris: 2002). See further Bauloye [218]

and [219].

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17 Islamic philosophy and

Jewish philosophy

the beginnings of medieval jewish philosophy

The broadest periodization of medieval philosophy, in general, and of

medieval Jewish philosophy, in particular, begins with Philo in the

first century and comes to an end with Spinoza in the seventeenth

century. This is the well-known periodization of Harry A. Wolfson,

who explains:

[We] describe this period as mediaeval, for after all it comes between a philosophy

which knew not of Scripture and a philosophy which tries to free itself

from Scripture, [so] mediaeval philosophy is the history of the philosophy of

Philo.1

Wolfson was in a sense correct. The problems and concerns of Philo

were to a great extent those of the medieval philosophers.2 Yet, while

it is helpful to think of the philosophy of Philo as the “Foundations

of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” virtually

all datings of medieval philosophy begin centuries later and in

the case of medieval Jewish philosophy nearly a millennium later.

The resistance of scholars to beginning medieval Jewish philosophy

with Philo is not simply a result of their discomfort with beginning

the medieval period in the first century. More importantly, if one

begins medieval Jewish philosophy with Philo, there is no continuity.

From Philo to the ninth century, there are no writings that may

be considered Jewish philosophy.3 Moreover, although Wolfson can

speak of the recurrence of Philonic views in post-Philonic Islamic

and Jewish philosophy, Philo – as far as we know – was not translated

into Arabic or Hebrew and accordingly had no direct influence

upon Jewish philosophers until the Renaissance. For these reasons it

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seems preferable to begin medieval Jewish philosophy in the ninth

and early tenth century – the same time that Islamic philosophy

begins – with figures such as Da¯wu¯ d al-Muqammas. (early ninth century),

Isaac Israeli (d. 955), and Saadia Gaon (882–942).

It is not a coincidence that philosophy emerges in Islam and

Judaism in the same period and in the same lands. The sudden awakening

of interest inphilosophy among Jews may be attributed directly

to the translation movements of the ninth and tenth centuries, centered

in Baghdad, that translated numerous Greek philosophic and

scientific works into Arabic; the ascendancy of Mu‘tazilite *kala¯m*

under the caliph al-Ma’mu¯ n in the first third of the ninth century in

Baghdad; and the influence of the first Muslimphilosopher, al-Kind¯ı,

in the first half of the ninth century, also inBaghdad. Thus, for example,

al-Muqammas. was a *mutakallim* whose views were similar to

those of contemporary Mu‘tazilite theologians; Israeli was a Neoplatonist

philosopher, influenced directly or indirectly by al-Kind¯ı;4

and Saadia, while much indebted to the structure and arguments of

the Mu‘tazilites, was an eclectic thinker whose major theologicalphilosophic

work, *Kita¯b al-ama¯na¯ t wa al-i‘tiqa¯da¯ t* (*Book of Beliefs*

*and Opinions*), reveals a familiarity with the teachings of a variety

of philosophic and theological schools.

the divergent paths of medieval islamic

and jewish philosophy

In short, the same factors that occasioned the birth of philosophy

in Islam in the ninth century made possible the renewed interest in

philosophy among Jews. Shlomo Pines, one of the leading scholars

of Jewish philosophy of the past century, has thus written:

Approximately from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, Jewish philosophical

and theological thought participated in the evolution of Islamic philosophy

and theology and manifested only in a limited sense a continuity of its

own. Jewish philosophers showed no particular preference for philosophic

texts written by Jewish authors over those composed by Muslims.5

Yet while it is true that philosophy appears in the medieval period

at the same time among Jews as it does among Muslims and that

“Jewish philosophical and theological thought participated in the

evolution of Islamic philosophy and theology,” it would be amistake

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to assume that Jewish philosophy and Islamic philosophy pursued

parallel tracks from their beginnings in the ninth century to the

turn of the thirteenth century. In fact, their histories are in some

crucial respects quite different. This may be seen from the following

thumbnail sketches of the histories of medieval Islamic philosophy

and Jewish philosophy.

Islamic philosophy began in the ninth century with al-Kind¯ı, the

“philosopher of the Arabs,” a well-known and prolific author. After

al-Kind¯ı, philosophy in Islam spread in different directionswith various

Islamic sects finding Plotinus’ teachings, particularly as disseminated

in the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, a key to understanding

their own theological doctrines. Here mention may be made

of the Ism¯a‘¯ıl¯ıs and their adoption and explication of Neoplatonic

teachings. The central role of al-Kind¯ı in the development of Islamic

philosophy, through his own writings, through the many important

Greek philosophic and scientific works that were translated for him

and his circle, and through his efforts to legitimize the philosophic

teachings of the ancients, is becoming more and more evident.6 Yet

despite al-Kind¯ı’s undisputed place in the history of Islamic philosophy,

he is often passed over in medieval Arabic listings of the leading

Islamic philosophers.7 It is al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı (ca. 870–950) who is recognized

as the first outstanding Islamic philosopher. He is the founder of

the tradition in Islamic philosophy rooted in the orderly study of

Aristotelian logic, physics, and metaphysics, and indebted to Plato

in matters of political philosophy. While al-Kind¯ı was familiar with

Aristotle’s writings, he was no Aristotelian; and while al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s

writings exhibit Neoplatonic features, he was no Neoplatonist.8 Al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı was followed byAvicenna in the East and Ibn B¯ajja, IbnT.

ufayl,

and Averroes in the twelfth-century Spanish West. There are significant

differences among these thinkers, but all belong to the tradition

of Islamic philosophy founded by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı. While it would not

be accurate to claim, as many have done, that philosophy in Islam

dies with the death of Averroes at the end of the twelfth century,

there is a sense in which this is true. The great tradition of Islamic

philosophy inaugurated by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı comes to an abrupt end or is at

least muted. Later philosophers in Islam will fail to appreciate the

importance of Aristotelian logic and the orderly study of Aristotelian

natural science and in some cases will dilute their philosophy with

heavy doses of mysticism or esoterica.

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Medieval Jewish philosophy begins, as we have seen, in the late

ninth, early tenth century with Isaac Israeli and, a bit later, Saadia

Gaon.9 These are two very different thinkers. Israeli is a Neoplatonist

philosopher very much indebted to al-Kind¯ı, yet, as Husik has

pointed out, “he never quotes any Jewish works, and there is nothing

in his writings to indicate that he is a Jew and is making an

effort to harmonize Judaism with philosophy and science.”10 In contrast,

Saadia is intent on proving rationally the theological truths

of Judaism and showing the weaknesses and inadequacies of those

arguments that gainsay those truths. He thus explains:

We inquire into and speculate about matters of our religion with two objectives

in mind. One of these is to have verified in fact what we have learned

from the prophets of God theoretically. The second is to refute him who

argues against us in regard to anything pertaining to our religion.11

For Saadia, philosophy is thus at the service of religion, but for him

logical reasoning is also a valid source of truth in its own right. As a

source of truth, no less so than Scripture, the teachings of reason –

when properly understood – may be expected to accord with those

of Judaism. When this agreement is seen, our beliefs become concretized

and no doubts remain.

This view of reason is maintained by later thinkers even in

anti-rationalistic tracts such as Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari*, which says,

“Heaven forbid that there should be anything in the Bible to contradict

that which is manifest or demonstrated.”12 Jews like Saadia

thus turned to philosophy to strengthen Jewish belief, while others

like Israeli turned to philosophy for the sake of knowledge.

Whatever the motivations, what is remarkable is that few Jewish

philosophers or philosophic theologians from Saadia and Israeli to

the second half of the twelfth century exhibit any influence by or

interest in al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, Avicenna (980–1037), Ibn B¯ajja (d. 1139), or any

of the other Islamic philosophers in the Farabian tradition of *falsafa*.

In fact, although Halevi’s *Kuzari* (1140) is in part a critique

of that stream of Aristotelian philosophy that was espoused by the

Islamic *fala¯ sifa*,13 it is hard to know what occasioned this particular

critique. As Pines has shown, his portrayal of the teachings of

the philosophers is based on those of Ibn B¯ajja and Avicenna,14 but

which Jewish philosophers of Halevi’s day were influenced by or

even well read in these philosophers? Halevi’s young friend Abraham

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ibn Ezra was certainly influenced by some of Avicenna’s writings –

for example, in his treatment of God’s knowledge of particulars and

in the distinction between necessary and possible existence – but

he is the exception and in any case can hardly be classified as a

philosopher in the Farabian mold. Similarly, the other known Jewish

philosophers in Spain at the time – the most important of whom

was Solomon ibn Gabirol (1021–58 or 1070) – may all be classed

as primarily Neoplatonist thinkers, who show little interest in the

*fala¯ sifa*. All this changes with Abraham ibn Da’ud (ca. 1110–80),

who, as Husik writes, was “the first Jewish philosopher who shows

an intimate knowledge of the works of Aristotle and makes a deliberate

effort to harmonize the Aristotelian system with Judaism.”15

IbnDa’ud’s debt to al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and, in particular,Avicenna has recently

been delineated,16 yet his place as the first Jewish philosopher in the

*fala¯ sifa* tradition is quickly overshadowed by Maimonides (1138–

1204), the best-known and perhaps greatest of the medieval Jewish

thinkers. Maimonides’ own philosophic teachings are rooted in the

writings of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, Avicenna, and Ibn B¯ajja.

After Maimonides, Hebrew replaces Arabic as the primary language

of Jewish philosophic discourse. The works of the *fala¯ sifa* are

translated into Hebrew, and the Aristotelianism of Maimonides and

Averroes becomes the dominant school of the leading thirteenthand

fourteenth-century Jewish philosophers. Most philosophers

of this period do not strive for originality, but rather seek to

expound the true teachings of philosophy and science. One major

exception is Gersonides (1288–1344), who focused in his *Wars*

*of the Lord* on those problems that he believed had not been

treated philosophically and correctly.17 His target is often Maimonides,

the Jewish philosopher he admired most, whose views he

claims are not always based on philosophic principles, but sometimes

on “theological considerations.”18 Another major exception

is H. asdai Crescas (d. ca. 1411) who criticized Maimonides, the

Jewish philosopher whom he most respected, for being “seduced by

the discourses of the philosophers.”19 Crescas’ philosophic critique

of Aristotelian/Maimonidean science was based on principles of

Aristotelian science. The core of the post-Maimonidean philosophic

enterprise within Judaism thus accepted Aristotle and the Islamic

*fala¯ sifa* as the leading philosophic authorities. While there were

Neoplatonic trends within post-Maimonidean Jewish philosophy,

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these were peripheral, had little impact, and need not concern us.20

Jewish interest in philosophy did not die out, but simply waned until

Spinoza heralded in a new period in the seventeenth century.

These two thumbnail sketches suggest that while philosophy

began in the medieval period in Islam and in Judaism at the same

time and in similar fashion, it developed in different ways or at

different paces in the two religious communities. The tradition of

Aristotelian philosophy in Islam begins with al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı in the first

half of the tenth century, continues with Avicenna in the East, and

moves to Spain in the early twelfth centurywith Ibn B¯ajja. It virtually

comes to an endwithAverroes’ death in 1198. This tradition does not

appear in Judaism until IbnDa’ud and Maimonides in the second half

of the twelfth century. Until this time Jewish philosophy is mostly

built upon the foundations of *kala¯m* or Neoplatonism. Averroes and

Maimonides were contemporaries. Averroes is the last great representative

of the Aristotelian tradition in Islam. Maimonides ushers

in this tradition within Judaism. Averroes and Maimonides would

become the two leading philosophic authorities among the Jews in

the centuries that followed them. It is in these centuries that the

Islamic *fala¯ sifa* would make their mark, in Hebrew translation, on

medieval Jewish thought. In what follows Iwill illustrate this impact

of the *fala¯ sifa* through select examples.

how did the fala￣ sifa come to influence

hebrew philosophy?

As we have seen, Islamic theology and philosophy, from their very

beginnings, exercised a direct influence upon contemporary Jewish

thought. Yet we have also seen that while the Mu‘tazilites and the

Muslim Neoplatonists impacted on their Jewish contemporaries, al-

Fa¯ ra¯bı¯ and his school of *fala¯ sifa* were all but neglected until the second

half of the twelfth century. In this light, how can their dominant

role in post-Maimonidean Hebrew philosophy be explained?

The answer lies in Maimonides. He was immediately recognized

as the outstanding thinker of his time, and in his *Guide of the Perplexed*

he expounded the Aristotelianism of the *fala¯ sifa*. Yet perhaps

the single most telling document regarding the influence of

the *fala¯ sifa* on post-Maimonidean Hebrew thought is Maimonides’

well-known letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon in which he recommends

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which philosophers to study and which to avoid. The two most

noticeable features of this part of Maimonides’ letter to Ibn Tibbon

are that he does not recommend a single Jewish thinker or a single

Neoplatonic work. Aristotle is the supreme philosopher, but he can

only be understood fully through the commentaries of Alexander

of Aphrodisias, Themistius, and Averroes. Apart from Aristotle,

Maimonides reserves his praise and recommendations for the Islamic

*fala¯ sifa*. Everything the scholar al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯ wrote is “fine flour,” the

books of Avicenna, while not equal to those of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, are useful

and should be studied and reflected upon, and Ibn B¯ajja was a great

philosopher, whose words and compositions are all straightforward.

Maimonides’ recommendations in this letter to a remarkable extent

determined the philosophers and the philosophic texts that were to

be translated from Arabic into Hebrew.21 The Arabic philosophic

texts that were translated became the philosophic texts that were

accessible and hence studied by the medieval Jewish thinkers who

read no Arabic. Thus, for example, Aristotle, the Philosopher whose

books could not be fully understoodwithout commentary, was translated

into Hebrew in only a few instances, while all or nearly all of

Averroes’ thirty-six commentaries on his works were systematically

translated into Hebrew. Post-Maimonidean Jewish philosophers thus

studied Aristotelian philosophy and science through the commentaries

of Averroes.22

the influence of the political teachings

of the fala￣ sifa

The importance of political philosophy for the *fala¯ sifa* is now generally

appreciated. Leo Strauss was the first modern scholar to state

that al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı “presented the whole of philosophy proper within a

political framework.”23 Muhsin Mahdi, the leading scholar today of

medieval Islamic political philosophy in general and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı in particular,

has in various studies explicated the nature of the Islamic

tradition of Platonic political philosophy founded by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı.

According to Mahdi, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı “brought to the fore the theme of the

relationship between philosophy and politics in a context where the

overriding question was the relationship between philosophy and

religion.”24 The political philosophy of the *fala¯ sifa* focuses on subjects

such as the true happiness and perfection of man and how one

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ought to live one’s life in order to achieve these goals. Accordingly,

this philosophy is concerned with the various roles of religion and

of philosophy in the well-being of the city and in the attainment of

individual human happiness. The Islamic *fala¯ sifa* wrote asMuslims

living in an Islamic community and, in particular, sought to adapt

Plato’s political teachings to their own religious communities. To

what extent did their political teachings on the relationship between

religion and philosophy influence medieval Jewish thought?

The influence of the political teachings of the Islamic *fala¯ sifa*

upon Jewish thought is best seen in Maimonides.25 This influence

is reflected in his discussions of such topics as the purpose of law,

the differences between divine law and human law, the nature of

human perfection, the nature of prophecy, the relation between the

prophet and the philosopher, the role of the prophet in the city, and

the extent to which man is a political animal.

In his discussion of these topics it is possible that Maimonides

was influenced directly by Plato or by Galenic or Neoplatonic summaries

of Plato’s dialogues. It is certain, however, that the predominant

influence upon his political teachings was that of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and

to a lesser extent Avicenna and Ibn B¯ajja. After Maimonides, when

the primary language of philosophy for Jews in the West became

Hebrew, Jews who did not have access to Arabic or Latin translations

no longer had direct access to Plato or any Greek summaries

of the dialogues. The only version of a Platonic text translated into

Hebrew was Samuel ben Judah of Marseilles’ version of Averroes’

*Commentary on Plato’s Republic*, completed in 1320 and thus one

of the last of Averroes’ commentaries to be translated into Hebrew.

Samuel wrote that until his translation “no part of this science [i.e.,

political science] was translated or came into our possession, neither

from the pen of the Philosopher (i.e., Aristotle) nor from anyone

else, except what is to be found in the *Book of the Principles of*

*Existing Things* [that is, the *Political Regime*] of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı.”26 While

Samuel’s statement is not completely accurate,27 it does reflect his

own knowledge, that of a learned Provenc﹐ al student of philosophy in

the early fourteenth century. Accordingly, not only did the Hebrew

reader not have access to the political teachings of Plato, he barely

had access to the political teachings of the *fala¯ sifa*. To the extent

that this was true, the *fala¯ sifa* exerted their influence upon Hebrew

thinkers in the area of political philosophy directly through a few

texts of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and mostly indirectly throughMaimonides’ *Guide*.

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Thus, for example, Nissim of Marseilles, writing in the first quarter

of the fourteenth century, is influenced by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s *Political*

*Regime* in his discussion of the need for a ruler and the account of

the perfect ruler, by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s *Enumeration of the Sciences* in his

approach to religion and philosophy, by Averroes’ *Epitome of the*

*“Parva Naturalia”* in his discussion of prophecy, but most of all

by Maimonides’ *Guide*.28 Within decades of Samuel’s translation,

new translations of political works by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, Avicenna, Ibn B¯ajja,

Ibn T.

ufayl, and Averroes appeared and Hebrew commentaries were

written on many of them, but the prime conduit for propagating

the political teachings of the *fala¯ sifa* remained Maimonides’ *Guide*.

The situation was quite different in the areas of logic, physics, psychology,

and metaphysics, where major writings and commentaries

of the *fala¯ sifa* were translated into Hebrew, were well known, and

their influence more direct.

the art of writing of the fala￣ sifa and their

jewish followers

The influence of the *fala¯ sifa* upon Maimonides’ political teachings

in particular as well as upon later Jewish political thought

in general extended beyond the treatment of particular subjects

to the art of writing about them. Avicenna had written that “it

is not proper for any man to reveal that he possesses knowledge

he is hiding from the vulgar [*al-‘a¯mma*] . . . Rather, he should let

them know of God’s majesty and greatness through symbols and

similitudes.”29 Maimonides in a similar vein speaks of the “secrets

and mysteries of the Torah” and the need to conceal them from

the vulgar. He explains in the introduction to the *Guide* that his

“purpose is that the truths be glimpsed and then again be concealed,

so as not to oppose that divine purpose which one cannot

possibly oppose and which has concealed from the vulgar among

the people those truths especially requisite for his apprehension.”30

Maimonides relates that the sages, who possessed knowledge of God,

spoke in parables and riddles when they wished to teach something

of this subject matter.31 In his introduction, he discusses his own esoteric

method of writing the *Guide* and gives pointers to his qualified

readers on how to understand his meaning. Later in part I, he explains

that the true opinions concerning the secrets and mysteries of

the Torah

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were not hidden, enclosed in riddles and treated by all men of knowledge

with all sorts of artifice through which they could teach them without

expounding them explicitly, because of something bad being hidden in them,

or because they undermine the foundations of Law . . . Rather have they been

hidden because at the outset the intellect is incapable of receiving them . . .

This is the cause of the fact that the “Torah speaketh in the language of the

sons of man” [BT Yevamot 71a, BT Bava Mes.i‘a 31b] . . . This is so because

it is presented in such a manner as to make it possible for the young, the

women, and all the people to begin with it and to learn it. Now it is not

within their power to understand these matters as they truly are. Hence

they are confined to accepting tradition with regard to all sound opinions

that are of such a sort that it is preferable that they should be pronounced

as true and with regard to all representations of this kind – and this in such

a manner that the mind is led toward the existence of the objects of these

opinions and representations but not toward grasping their essence as it

truly is.32

In other words, Maimonides wishes to assure his vulgar reader that

although the Torah, the sages, and he himself engage in concealment,

this is not because the teachings that are so hidden undermine the

faith. Rather it is a consequence of the different intellects of man.

Some are able to understand the secrets of the Torah as they truly are,

while most others must understand these truths through tradition

and through representations of them. The truths are basically the

same, but they are known in different ways. As for knowing these

secrets as they truly are, Maimonides had assured the reader in the

introduction that “these great secrets are [not] fully and completely

known to anyone among us.”33

Maimonides’ distinction between his intended readers and the

vulgar readers or between the few and the many reflects the approach

of the *fala¯ sifa*. Al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯, for example, had written in his *Attainment*

*of Happiness*:

[N]ations and the citizens of cities are composed of some who are the elect

[*al-kh¯ as.s.*

*a*] and others who are the vulgar [*al-‘a¯mma*]. The vulgar confine

themselves, or should be confined, to theoretical cognitions that are in conformity

with unexamined common opinion. The elect do not . . . but reach

their conviction and knowledge on the basis of premises subjected to thorough

scrutiny.34

This distinction between the elite and the multitude was understood

by all the *fala¯ sifa* and is the underlying reason for their esotericism.

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This does not mean that they agreed either on the limitations of

human knowledge or on the intellectual capabilities of the multitude.

In fact, there was no standard position. The issue of the

limitations of human knowledge for Maimonides and the Islamic

*fala¯ sifa* has been discussed in recent decades in several important

studies.35 As for the intellectual capabilities of the multitude, it

is, as we have seen, agreed by the *fala¯ sifa* that they cannot know

things by demonstration or as they really are. The disagreement concerns

what precisely they are capable of grasping. Thus, for example,

Maimonides insisted that they be taught to believe that God is incorporeal;

while Averroes maintained that this was not a suitable belief

for the multitude.36

Maimonides’ explanation for the need for esotericism, cited above,

is itself inevitably esoteric. Is it true that the sages and the philosophers

do not conceal their teachings “because of something bad being

hidden in them, or because they undermine the foundations of law”?

A century after Maimonides, Isaac Albalag wrote inhis book, *Tiqqun*

*ha-De‘ot*, that Maimonides taught creation in place of eternity. But

was thisMaimonides’ true position or simply his exoteric one? Scholars

today disagree, but Albalag suggested that “it is possible that, in

his discretion, the Master did not think it useful to reveal what the

Torah has concealed from the vulgar.”37 Albalag explained that at the

time of Maimonides “the theory of the eternity of the world was altogether

alien to theminds of the common people, so much so that the

simple believers imagined that if anyone accepted it he so to speak

denied the whole Torah.”38 In other words, for Albalag, Maimonides

exoterically put forward the philosophically indefensible opinion of

creation because the multitude in his day could not bear the truth

of eternity, which view would have undermined the foundations of

law for them. In a similar vein, Gersonides argued that certain of

Maimonides’ teachings were forced by theological considerations.

Thus, for example, he writes:

It seems to us that Maimonides’ position on this question of divine cognition

is not implied by any philosophical principles; indeed reason denies his view,

as I will show. It seems rather that theological considerations have forced

him to this view.39

Gersonides related to Maimonides exoteric teachings which he

claimed could not stand up to philosophic argument. For Gersonides,

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Maimonides was compelled to hold these views because he believed

the philosophic teachings undermined the faith. In other words, both

Albalag and Gersonides among others held that Maimonides put forward

exoteric and philosophically inadequate teachings concerning

the secrets of the Torah precisely because he believed the philosophic

views undermined the belief of the multitude.40

Maimonides could respond to these accusations that the secrets

of the Torah need to be concealed not because they undermine the

faith, but because, given the intellectual capacities of the vulgar,

they could lead them astray. This raises the question of the difference

between knowing something as it truly is and accepting it by

tradition as true. In other words, what is the difference between the

knowledge of the few and the beliefs of the many? These questions

are treated most directly by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı in his *Attainment of Happiness*,

his most important work on the relation between philosophy

and religion. There he writes that philosophy is prior to religion in

time and that religion is an imitation of philosophy. “In everything

of which philosophy gives an account based on intellectual perception,

religion gives an account based on imagination.”41 According

to al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, the function of the philosopher is thus not only to learn

the sciences, to know the beings, to attain supreme happiness, but

also to exploit hiswisdom for the good of the multitude who can only

come to know the images. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı writes that the “perfect philosopher

is the one who not only possesses the theoretical sciences, but

also the faculty for exploiting them for the benefit of all others so

that they too can reach happiness or perfection according to their

capacity.”42 Only the man who has grasped the truths can represent

the images of these truths to others. As Mahdi explains, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı

assigns to the philosopher a function ordinarily associated with the

prophet, the founder of a religion.43 Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı thus describes here the

emergence of natural religion whereby the philosopher brings into

being and establishes a religion in a natural way by means of his

knowledge and imagination, without divine revelation. Now there

is some disagreement among scholars as to whether Maimonides

saw the relation of Judaism to philosophy in precisely this light, but

there is no question that al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s statements in the *Attainment of*

*Happiness* influenced his thinking.

Interestingly, the *Attainment of Happiness* and indeed the entire

trilogy, *The Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, of which it is the

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first part, were not translated into Hebrew, despite the great respect

held for their author and their important subject matter. Shem-T. ov

Falaquera in the mid-thirteenth century wrote an abbreviated paraphrastic

Hebrew version of the three books of the trilogy inhis *Reshit*

*H.*

*okhma*, but did not specify that his paraphrase was based on al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı. Rather he wrote that his words were those of “Aristotle or

of the philosophers of his school.”44 To the extent that Falaquera’s

paraphrase influenced other authors, it may be seen as an illustration

of the way inwhich Arabic thought at times penetrated directly

into Jewish philosophic discourse without the author’s awareness of

its source. In addition, Falaquera’s paraphrase is itself of interest for

the way in which a thirteenth-century thinker, very well read and

strongly influenced by the *fala¯ sifa*, sought to present their political

teachings to his Jewish reader.45

Falaquera alone among the Jewish medievals, or moderns for that

matter, attached enough value to al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s most important writings

on the relation between philosophy and religion, the *Philosophy of*

*Plato and Aristotle* as well as chapters from the *Book of Letters*, to

translate them into Hebrew. Remarkably, he omits their most interesting

and controversial sections, such as the one from the *Attainment*

*of Happiness* cited above. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı suggests in these sections

that philosophy alone is necessary for human happiness and perfection.

Religion is animitation of philosophy that is useful for teaching

and governing the multitude, but does not contribute to the perfection

of the philosopher’s intellect. Falaquera was not prepared to go

that far. He was not prepared to say that true religion is an imitation

of philosophy and comes after it. Philosophy, for him, may be

necessary for human happiness, but it is not sufficient.

the genre of supercommentary: gersonides

and his school

As we have seen, in the areas of logic, physics, psychology, and metaphysics,

wheremajorwritings and commentaries of the *fala¯ sifa*were

translated into Hebrew and well known, their influence is manifest

and direct. Aristotle was the Philosopher, but Jews learned

Aristotelian science primarily through the commentaries of Averroes.

Shortly after Qalonimus ben Qalonimus completed the project

of the translation of Averroes’ epitomes and middle commentaries

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on natural science and thus made possible the thorough study of

Aristotelian science and philosophy in Hebrew, a new genre of literature

emerged with Gersonides’ commentaries (written between

the years 1321 and 1324) on Averroes’ commentaries. Gersonides’

supercommentaries were the most popular of the genre, but similar

commentaries onAverroes were written by Gersonides’ students and

colleagues in subsequent years.46 These supercommentaries explicated

the commentaries of Averroes in a way similar to that inwhich

Averroes had explicated the texts of Aristotle. One significant difference

is that while Averroes’ commentaries could be read independently

of the book of Aristotle upon which they commented, this

was usually not the case for the supercommentaries.47 Rather, like

the medieval Hebrew Biblical or Talmudic commentaries, they were

intended to be read alongwith the text upon which they commented.

Gersonides states explicitly that his purpose in these supercommentaries

on the epitomes is “to explain concisely the epitomes

of Averroes on the physical writings of Aristotle, for even though

most of what Averroes says is very clear, there remain some profound

things that he does not sufficiently explain.”48 His stated aim

is more ambitious in his introduction to the middle commentaries

on the physical writings:

In the places where our opinion does not agree with that of Aristotle, we will

mention our opinions and refute those of Aristotle . . . This is in addition to

the benefit that follows from such a commentary for the students in helping

them understand some difficult things.49

But these different statements of purpose should not be interpreted

to mean that Gersonides is acquiescent in his commentaries on the

epitomes. Jesse Mashbaum, for example, has shown how in his commentary

on Averroes’ *Epitome of the “De Anima”* he rejects positions

of both Aristotle and Averroes on human intellection as formulated

inAverroes’ *Epitome* and*Middle Commentary*.50 Similarly,

Ruth Glasner, who has contributed more than any other scholar to

our appreciation of Gersonides as a boldly original interpreter of Aristotle

and Averroes, has time and again cited Gersonides’ commentaries

on the epitomes of the books on natural science as well as those

on themiddle commentaries to illustrate his rejections of fundamental

Aristotelian teachings presented therein, such as the Aristotelian

accounts of natural motion and violent motion.51 But these studies

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and others that illustrate Gersonides’ role in the supercommentaries

as a critic of teachings of both Aristotle and Averroes should not

cloud the simple fact that Gersonides was himself an Aristotelian

who very much valued the commentaries of Averroes. Thus Charles

Manekin, who has studied Gersonides’ supercommentaries on the

books of the *Organon* and has investigated his role as an informed

and competent critic of aspects of Aristotle’s logic, has noted that

Gersonides “thanks Averroes for performing zealously the task of a

commentator, which, he says, is to determine the true intentions of

the author and not to distort them for the sake of criticism.”52

The fact is that medieval Jewish Aristotelians studied Aristotelian

science through the commentaries of Averroes and respected him

as *the* Commentator. While Averroes himself repeatedly praised

Aristotle in the highest of terms for having originated and completed

the sciences and thus saw his own task simply to explain the truths

that he taught (and if absolutely necessary to correctmistaken teachings

subtly), supercommentators like Gersonides, despite their high

estimations of Aristotle and his Commentator, were less dogmatic

and less hesitant to criticize them.53

the waning of the influence of the fala￣ sifa

on jewish thought

The influence of the *fala¯ sifa* on post-Maimonidean Jewish thought

is evidenced in several areas: (1) the study of science and philosophy

according to the proper order, which entails first mastering logic,

then studying natural science according to the order of the books of

the Aristotelian corpus, and only then studying metaphysics; (2) the

study of logic, natural science, and metaphysics through the books

of Aristotle as interpreted by Averroes; (3) the impact of Plato in matters

of political philosophy as his thought was adapted to religious

communities by al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯ and later *fala¯ sifa*; (4) a subtle writing style

that considers the different intellectual capacities and shortcomings

of potential readers; and (5) theological-philosophic discussions such

as those related to the existence of God, his attributes, his knowledge

of particulars, creation, prophecy, providence, free will, ethics,

immortality of the soul, and the happiness and perfection of man.

It would be a mistake to imagine that Jewish thinkers learned

science and philosophy from the *fala¯ sifa*, but were uninfluenced

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by their theological discussions. Indeed those Jews who, following

the recommendation of Maimonides, learned science from Averroes’

commentaries inevitably had to confront his theological teachings

that could be found embedded in the commentaries. It is only reasonable

that if they respected his philosophy and science, they would

consider carefully his theological philosophy. It thus is not surprising

that when Rabbi H.

asdai Crescas wrote his *Light of the Lord*, as

part of his efforts to strengthen the faith of the Jewish communities

of Spain after the devastating massacres and mass conversions of

1391, he began with a pioneering critique of fundamental teachings

of Aristotelian/Averroist natural science. After all, it was this science

that led some of its followers to believe in an impersonal God

and an eternal world without the possibility of miracles, a world

that held little hope for the immortal existence and happiness of the

individual soul. For Crescas, it was not reason that was to blame, but

the “weak premises” of Aristotelian/Averroist science and “the fallaciousness

of its proofs and the fraudulence of its arguments.”54 In

his defense of Judaism against this science, Crescas, like al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı

before him, employed his extensive knowledge of Aristotle and the

*fala¯ sifa*. Crescas was determined to play by their rules and refute

the teachings of the philosophers on the basis of Aristotelian logic

and proof. Here again one may see a striking similarity with al-

Ghaz¯ al¯ı. Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı was the only Islamic student of philosophy who

prefaced his critique of that philosophy with a separate, clear, and

even, at times, improved account of that philosophy. Crescas was

the only Jewish student of philosophy who prefaced his critique

of Aristotelian philosophy and science with a separate, clear, and

even, at times, improved account of that philosophy. Crescas carefully

presented the arguments of Aristotelian/Averroist science in

order to refute those that were not valid. Yet his critique of that

science – with his revolutionary ideas of infinity, space, vacuum,

motion, time, and matter and form – was not immediately successful,

even among opponents of Averroist philosophy. Jews continued

to study Averroes’ Aristotelian commentaries in the fifteenth century,

but perhaps thanks to Crescas, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s Avicennian science

as presented in the *Intentions of the Philosophers* suddenly became

a respected alternative.55 Moreover, Jewish scholars were becoming

more and more influenced by the new approaches of the Latin

scholastics.At the same time the *fala¯ sifa*-inspired radical theological

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teachings and concomitant esotericism that were to some extent a

hallmark of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Jewish Aristotelianism

were slowly fading into oblivion. The *fala¯ sifa* were still read,

but by the mid-fifteenth century, it was no longer possible to speak

of their predominant influence.

notes

1 H. A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism,*

*Christianity, and Islam*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: 1947), vol. II, 459.

2 Consider Wolfson’s description of the “synthetic mediaeval philosopher,

made up of all the common elements of the Christian, the Moslem,

and the Jewish philosopher,” in *Philo*, vol. II, 446–55.

3 There are no philosophic discussions in the ancient Rabbinic literature.

See S. Lieberman, “How Much Greek in Jewish Palestine,” in A.

Altmann (ed.), *Biblical and Other Studies* (Cambridge, MA: 1962), 130,

who states categorically that “Greek philosophic terms are absent from

the entire ancient Rabbinic literature.” See also Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. I,

91–2, and W. Z. Harvey, “Rabbinic Attitudes toward Philosophy,” in

H. J. Blumberg and B. Braude (eds.), *“Open Thou Mine Eyes”: Essays*

*on Aggadah and Judaica Presented to Rabbi William G. Braude on*

*his Eightieth Birthday* (Hoboken, NJ: 1992), 83–101. Harvey concludes

(101): “The Rabbis considered philosophy to be foreign to their concerns.

They did not use technical philosophic terms, and did not write down

systematic answers to philosophic questions.” Cf. D. Novak, “The Talmud

as a Source for Philosophical Reflection,” in Frank and Leaman

[234], 62–80. To be sure, theological and cosmological speculations may

be found in early Hebrew cryptic texts, such as *Sefer Yes.*

*ira* (*Book of*

*Creation*).

4 On al-Kind¯ı’s influence on Israeli, see A. Altmann and S.M. Stern, *Isaac*

*Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* (Oxford:

1958), esp. 27–31, 37–9, 42–5, 68–70, 143–5, 186, 210.

5 S. Pines, “Jewish Philosophy,” in P. Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of*

*Philosophy* (New York: 1967), vol. IV, 262–3.

6 See, for example, Endress [67], and chapter 2 above.

7 For example, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı [111], 4, singles out al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and Avicenna;

Ibn T.

ufayl omits mention of al-Kind¯ı in his introduction to *H.*

*ayy ibn*

*Yaqz. a¯n*; Maimonides does not recommend him in his letter to Ibn

Tibbon (see below); and Ibn Khaldu¯ n excludes himin his list of the greatest

Islamic philosophers (see Ibn Khaldu¯ n, *The Muqaddimah*, trans.

F. Rosenthal [Princeton: 1967], vol. III, 116).

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8 See Mahdi [190], esp. 1–3. For a very different characterization, see

M. Fakhry, *Al-Fa¯ ra¯bı¯: Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism* (Oxford:

2002).

9 For this sketch, I will not consider al-Muqammas., whom as we have

indicated parts little from the path of the Islamic theologians.

10 Husik [238], 14.

11 Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. S. Rosenblatt

(New Haven, CT: 1948), 27–8.

12 Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, trans. H. Hirschfeld (New York: 1964), I.67.54;

cf. I.89.62.

13 I use the technical Arabic term *fala¯ sifa* (lit.: philosophers) to refer to

those philosophers who followed in the tradition of Islamic philosophy

inaugurated by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı.

14 See S. Pines, “Sh¯ı‘iteTerms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari*,”

*Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), 210–19. Pines argues

that the philosophic doctrine presented in *Kuzari* I.1 is patterned after

Ibn B¯ajja, while that presented in the critique of philosophy in book V is

that of Avicenna. He suggests that “in the course of the longish interval

of time which possibly separates the composition of book I from that

of book V, Judah Halevi was exposed to the influence of Avicenna’s

writings” (216). Pines adds that Halevi “was greatly impressed” by

Avicenna, and may have tried, despite his critique of Avicenna’s doctrines,

to adapt his own ideas to “this newly discovered framework”

(219). See further D. Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi*

*Language of Religious Experience in Judahha-Levi’s* “*Kuzari*” (Albany,

NY: 2000), 170–1.

15 Husik [238], 198–9.

16 See T. A. M. Fontaine, *In Defence of Judaism: Abraham Ibn Daud*

(Assen: 1990), and A. Eran, *Me-Emuna Tamma le-Emuna Rama*

(Tel-Aviv: 1998).

17 Gersonides, *Wars of the Lord*, trans. S. Feldman, 3 vols. (Philadelphia:

1984–99), introduction, vol. I, 93.

18 III.3, vol. II, 107.

19 H.

asdai Crescas, *Or Hashem* (*Light of the Lord*), introduction, trans. in

W. Harvey, “H.

asdai Crescas’s Critique of the Theory of the Acquired

Intellect” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1973), 363.

20 For an account of such Neoplatonic trends, see D. Schwartz, *Yashan*

*be-Qanqan H. adash* (Jerusalem: 1996).

21 See Harvey [235]; for editions of the letter, see 51 n. 1.

22 On the medieval Arabic-to-Hebrew translations of philosophic texts

and on the influence ofAverroes’ commentaries, seemyarticle in Frank

and Leaman [234].

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23 See, for example, L. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*

(Glencoe, IL: 1952), 9.

24 Mahdi [190], 3.

25 The influence of the political writings of the *fala¯ sifa* on Maimonides

has been the subject of numerous studies over the past fifty years.

26 Translated by L. V. Berman in his “Greek into Hebrew: Samuel ben

Judah of Marseilles, Fourteenth-Century Philosopher and Translator,”

in A. Altmann (ed.), *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge,

MA: 1967), 309–10. The following year Samuel made Aristotle’s

*Nicomachean Ethics* available to the Hebrew reader through a translation

of Averroes’*Middle Commentary on the “Ethics.”* Samuel’s biographer,

Lawrence Berman, has written that through the translation of

these two fundamental works of political philosophy, Samuel “introduced

into the curriculum of Hebrew philosophical studies a new discipline”

(ibid., 302).

27 For example, Qalonimus ben Qalonimus had translated al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s *Enumeration*

*of the Sciences* in 1314. In the thirteenth century, Shem-Tov

Falaquera had translated various passages from the political writings

of the *fala¯ sifa*.

28 See Nissim of Marseilles, *Ma‘ase Nissim*, ed. H. Kreisel (Jerusalem:

2000), author’s introduction, 8–30, and ch. 4, 70–1.

29 Avicenna [88], X.2, trans. M. E. Marmura, in Lerner and Mahdi [189],

100–1. Virtually the same formulation is found in *al-Naja¯ t* (Cairo:

1938), 305.

30 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines (Chicago: 1963),

I, introduction, 6–7. Hereafter *Guide*.

31 *Guide*, I, introduction, 8.

32 *Guide* I.33, 71. Similarly in I.17, 43, he explains that “it is incumbent

upon us . . . not to state explicitly a matter that is either remote from

the understanding of the multitude or the truth of which as it appears

to the imagination of these people is different from what is intended

by us.”

33 *Guide* I, introduction, 7.

34 Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı, *Attainment of Happiness*, trans. M. Mahdi, in *Alfarabi’s*

*Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (rev. edn., Ithaca, NY: 1969), sec. 50,

41.

35 The landmark such study to which others respond is S. Pines, “The

Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and

Maimonides,” in I. Twersky (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Jewish History*

*and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: 1979), 82–109.

36 Cf. the selections in I. Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader* (New York:

1972), 44–5, 246–8, 251, 265, 286, 418,withAverroes,*Kita¯b al-kashf ‘an*

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*mana¯hij al-adilla*, trans. I.Najjar, *Faith and Reason in Islam:Averroes’*

*Exposition of Religious Arguments* (Oxford: 2001), 51–2, 56–62, 75–7.

37 Cited in Sirat [239], 241.

38 Sirat [239], 242.

39 Gersonides, *Wars of the Lord*, III.3, vol. II, 107.

40 Gersonides himself, whose own explicit theological-philosophic teachings

were no less radical than those attributed to Maimonides’ esoteric

positions, promised to write in a clear straightforward fashion without

“rhetorical flourishes or obscure language” as the profundity of the

subject was sufficient to ward off the unqualified reader (*Wars of the*

*Lord*, introduction, vol. I, 101). In contrast,H.

asdai Crescas held: “There

is nothing in these things, i.e., the science of physics and metaphysics,

which requires secrecy and concealment if, by God, that in them which

is heretical and destructive of theistic religion is not called secrets of

the Torah” (cited inS. Pines, “Scholasticism after Thomas Aquinas and

the Teachings of Hasdai Crescas and his Predecessors,” *Proceedings of*

*the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 1, no. 10 [1967], 51 n.

99).

41 Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı, *Attainment of Happiness*, sec. 55, 44–5.

42 Ibid., sec. 54, 43.

43 Mahdi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, introduction, 7.

44 *Reshit H. okhma* (Berlin: 1902), 61.

45 See my “Falaquera’s Alfarabi: An Example of the Judaization of the

Islamic *Fala¯ sifah*,” *Trumah* 12 (2002), 97–112.

46 See R. Glasner, “Levi ben Gershom and the Study of Ibn Rushd in the

Fourteenth Century,” *JewishQuarterly Review* 86 (1995), 51–90. Glasner

has shown that Gersonides not only composed the first supercommentary

on Averroes, but that most other known supercommentaries

from the fourteenth century, not written by him, were composed by

his students, who studied Averroes’ commentaries under his direction.

47 On this point, see J. Mashbaum, “Chapters 9–12 of Gersonides’ Supercommentary

on Averroes’ *Epitome of the ‘De Anima’*: The Internal

Senses” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1981), lxv–lxvi.

48 Gersonides, *Commentary on Averroes’ Epitome of the “Physics,”*

London, Jew’s College MS. Bet Hamidrash 43, fol. 126r.

49 Gersonides, *Commentary on Averroes’ Middle Commentary on the*

*“Physics,”* Paris MS. Biblioth`eque nationale h’eb. 964, fol. 1v. The

extent of Gersonides’ critique of Aristotelian science in his supercommentaries

is just now coming to light. For a clear illustration, see R.

Glasner, “Gersonides’ Theory of Natural Motion,” *Early Science and*

*Medicine* 1 (1996), 151–203, and “Gersonides on Simple and Composite

Movements,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 28 (1997),

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545–84. See, in general, Glasner’s “On the Writings of Gersonides’

Philosophical Commentaries,” in *Les m´ethodes de travail de Gersonide*

*et lemaniement du savoir chez les Scolastiques*, ed. C. Sirat (Paris:

2003), 90–103, esp. 98–101.

50 Mashbaum, “Gersonides’ Supercommentary,” xxxviiiff. In contrast,

Mashbaum remarks that “in his treatment of the internal senses other

than intellect, Gersonides follows Averroes with little demurral. His

comments are limited for the most part to mere explication of the text”

(liii).

51 See the articles referred to in n. 49, above.

52 C. Manekin, “Preliminary Observations on Gersonides’ Logical Writings,”

*Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 52

(1985), 94.

53 Although see Glasner, “Theory of Natural Motion,” 151, who observes

that Gersonides “does not introduce his new ideas [on natural motion]

systematically, and does not argue openly with either Aristotle or

Averroes. His ideas are conveyed through a subtle and sophisticated

work of exegesis.”

54 Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, introduction, 363–6.

55 See W. Z. Harvey and S. Harvey, “Rabbi H.

asdai Crescas’s Attitude

toward al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı” [Hebrew], in N. Ilan (ed.), *The Intertwined Worlds*

*of Islam: Essays in Memory of Hava Lazarus-Yafeh* (Jerusalem: 2002),

191–210.

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18 Arabic into Latin: the reception

of Arabic philosophy into

Western Europe

In the history ofWestern philosophy the role played by texts written

in Arabic is crucial. This can be seen from the sheer volume of works

that were translated (see the table that follows this chapter).We have

hints of Arabic-speaking teachers of philosophy. Adelard of Bath

(fl. 1116–50) speaks of his *studia Arabica/Arabum studia* (in reference

to natural philosophy) and *magistri*,1 which he probably

encountered in southern Italy and Sicily. Stephen of Pisa (fl. 1127),

who wrote on cosmology in Antioch, expresses his debt to “a certain

Arab.”2 Kama¯ l al-Dı¯n ibn Yu¯ nus ofMosul (d. 1242), the greatest

Muslim teacher of his time, in turn, boasted of Christians among

his pupils; one of Ibn Yu¯ nus’ pupils, Sira¯ j al-Dı¯n Urmawı¯, became a

member of Frederick II Hohenstaufen’s household and wrote a book

on logic for him.3 Andrea Alpago (d. before 1546) acquired knowledge

of Avicenna’s psychology from the Sh¯ı‘ite scholar Muh.ammad ibn

Makk¯ı Shams al-D¯ın al-Dimashq¯ı (d. 1531) in Damascus.4 But it is

through the surviving Arabic texts and their translations that we can

best gauge the extent of the impact of Arabic philosophy. The works

translated reflect the various genres current in Arabic.

(1) Arabic translations of Greek philosophical works, of which

the great majority are those of Aristotle or commentaries on

them. The *Republic* of Plato, though translated into Arabic,

was not subsequently translated into Latin. Certain opinions

of philosophers other than Aristotle survive in doxographies:

see (5) below.

(2) The summary or *questio*: e.g., among al-Kindı¯’s *rasa¯ ’il*

(“letters” or “treatises”), *On Sleep* deals with questions arising

from Aristotle’s *De Somno et Vigiliis*; his *On the Five*

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*Essences*, those from the *Physics*; and his *On Moistures and*

*Rain* (part of the Latin *De Mutatione Temporum*), those from

the *Meteora*. Al-Kind¯ı’s model was the *questiones* of Alexander

of Aphrodisias (2nd cent. C.E.), three of which were also

translated from Arabic into Latin. Also to be mentioned in

this context is the Pseudo-Avicennian *Book on the Heavens*

*and the World* which brings together sixteen questions

arising from Aristotle’s *De Caelo*.5

(3) The systematic treatise on *falsafa* (Peripatetic philosophy).

The most important text of this kind is Avicenna’s *al-*

*Shifa¯ ’* (*The Healing*, namely from ignorance). The title was

wrongly (but aptly) translated into Latin as *Sufficientia*, as

if Avicenna’s single comprehensive work was a sufficient

replacement for the several books of Aristotle.6 Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı’s

*Aims of the Philosophers* provided a compendious and easily

digestible summary of Avicenna’s philosophy.

(4) The commentary. The Arabic tradition of commentaries on

Aristotle, deriving from that of the Greek, develops from al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı, through Ibn B¯ajja (Avempace) to Averroes. Ibn B¯ajja

was known in the medieval West only through the works of

Averroes.

(5) The doxography. The Greek model for the arrangement of

opinions of diverse philosophers under topics was a text by

Ae‥ tios of Rhodes, translated by Qust.a¯ ibn Lu¯ qa¯ in the ninth

century. This was followed by a number of Arabic works,

among whichH.

unayn ibn Ish. a¯q,*A¯ da¯b al-fala¯ sifa* (*Witty Sayings*

*of the Philosophers*) was translated into Castilian. A

faint echo of a Greek doxography survives in the alchemical

*Turba Philosophorum* (whose Arabic text is lost), which

preserves some opinions of Presocratic philosophers among

a welter of spurious attributions.

These Arabic works became known in the West from the late

eleventh century onward. The beginnings can be discerned amongst

the interest in medicine and natural philosophy among scholars in

southern Italy, where a medical school in Salerno had long been

established, and where Alfanus, archbishop of Salerno (d. 1085),

translated from Greek Nemesius’ *On the Nature of Man*, under the

title *The Trunk of Physics* (*Premnon Physicon*). It was at Salerno that

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Constantine the African arrived from Tunisia with a collection of

books in Arabic whose contents he went on to translate in the ideal

academic environment of the abbey of Montecassino, the mother

house of the Benedictine Order. The Arabic texts were products of

the thriving school of medicine in Qayraw¯an, represented especially

by the work of Isaac Israeli and his pupil Ibn al-Jazz ¯ar. Constantine or

his colleagues also translated texts belonging to the realm of physics:

Isaac Israeli’s text*Onthe Elements*, the chapter on the elements from

the Arabic version of Nemesius’ *On the Nature of Man*, a short text

on mineralogy, and Qust.a¯ ibn Lu¯ qa¯ ’s *On Physical Ligatures*.7 Moreover,

the medical translations, especially that of the *Royal Book* of

‘Alı¯ ibn al-‘Abba¯ s al-Maju¯ sı¯ (a work known in Latin as the *Pantegni*),

were used by scholars of the first half of the twelfth century, such

as William of Conches and Bernardus Silvestris, as sources for their

own philosophy of nature.8 It was perhaps in this environment that

Adelard of Bath picked up the Arabic learning that he purports to

provide in his *Questions on Natural Science*, though specific Arabic

texts from which he could have drawn this learning have not been

identified.

arabic falsafa as the conduit of aristotelian

philosophy

The burgeoning interest in natural philosophy in the early twelfth

century presages the establishment of a completely new field of

learning in the Latin Middle Ages, which was to supplement the

traditional education in the seven liberal arts, divided into the arts

of speaking (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the mathematical arts

(arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy). It led to the recovery

of Aristotle’s works on natural philosophy (*libri naturales*), from

both Greek and Arabic sources. Most of the Greek texts evidently

came from Constantinople, where the principal translators, James

of Venice and Burgundio of Pisa (d. 1193) could be found together in

1136 involved in the negotiations between the Eastern and Western

Churches, though *Magna Graecia* (southern Italy and Sicily)

and Antioch were also places where Greek manuscripts and scholars

could be found. The majority of the *libri naturales* were translated

from Greek in the twelfth century, but the presence of two translations

of the same work, and the omissions of parts of the corpus,

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suggest that the process was rather haphazard.9 In the case of translations

from Arabic, on the other hand, a more systematic program

can be discerned, and this was centered in Toledo.

There are several reasons for the preeminence of Toledo as the

main place for translation from Arabic into Latin from the midtwelfth

century onward. As the metropolitan city of the Iberian

peninsula it was the cultural capital, and the home of well-educated

Latin clergy from outside the peninsula. The predominant language

of the inhabitants, however, was Arabic, and libraries of Arabic

manuscripts could be found in the city. Moreover, Toledo was the

closest place of refuge for Jewish scholars escaping from the intolerant

regime of the Almohads who had taken over Islamic Spain in

1147. Also, perhaps not without significance is that the last of the

line of the kings of Saragossa, Ja‘far Ah.mad III Sayf al-Dawla, was

given a residence in Toledo in 1140 and was treated as an honorable

resident of the city. His library had been accessible to Michael,

bishop of Tarazona, the patron of the translator Hugo of Santalla,

before Ja‘far moved to Toledo. We know only of texts on mathematics,

the science of the stars, and divination that are likely to have

come from his library, but it is worth noting that Ibn Gabirol (or

Avicebron, d. 1058 or 1070) and Ibn B¯ajja (d. 1139) had resided in the

kingdom of Saragossa, and their books may have enriched the royal

library.

The translation of Arabic philosophical works in Toledo follows a

double trajectory, which can be associated respectively with the near

contemporary scholars, Gerard of Cremona (1114–87), a canon of the

cathedral, and Dominicus Gundisalvi (fl. 1162–90), an archdeacon

of Segovia resident at the cathedral. The path followed by Gundisalvi

is the subject of the next section of this chapter. A list of the

translations made by Gerard was drawn up by his pupils (*socii*)

after his death.10 It is arranged according to subject matter, starting

with his contribution to the traditional seven liberal arts (logic,

geometry, and astronomy are represented); then turning to the new

arts of *philosophia* and medicine. Whereas in earlier Latin works,

*philosophia* was the subject of the seven liberal arts, here it is equivalent

to Arabic *falsafa* and is applied to natural philosophy, and

metaphysics.

Gerard would have known the program of *falsafa* from al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s

*On the Classification of the Sciences*, which he translated. For here,

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each of the main divisions of learning are described, from grammar

and logic, through mathematics, natural philosophy, and metaphysics,

to politics, jurisprudence, and theology. Moreover, the relevant

books by Aristotle are mentioned. Evidently as a preparation

for the study of natural philosophy, Gerard translated the *Posterior*

*Analytics* under the title *The Book of Demonstration* (the work’s

descriptive title, commonly used in the Arabic tradition); for in it is

explained how a philosophical argument should be conducted. Judging

from the order of the works in the list of the *socii*, metaphysics –

the investigation of the ultimate causes of things – was regarded as

preceding physics.11 Gerard chose to translate not the *Metaphysics*

of Aristotle (mentioned by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı), but rather an Arabic text based

on the *Elements of Theology* of Proclus, whose title is literally translated

as “the exposition of pure goodness,” but which became known

in the West more commonly simply as *On Causes* (*De Causis*).12

In natural philosophy itself Gerard appears to have followed al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s template faithfully. For al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı divides the faculty into

eight parts or “inquiries” (*fuh. ¯ us.*

), and translations of the texts relevant

to the first three of these are listed in the same order by the

*socii*: the *Physics*, the *De Caelo*, and the *De Generatione et Corruptione*.

There then follows *On the Causes of the Properties of the Four*

*Elements*, a Pseudo-Aristotelian work on the different parts of the

earth and their elemental constituents, that naturally falls between

the *De Generatione et Corruptione*, and the text mentioned in the

fourth “inquiry” of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı: the first three books of the *Meteora*.

These three books were translated by Gerard, and this, apparently,

is as far as he got. But his enterprise was continued by his successors.

For Alfred of Shareshill, deliberately evoking the authority of al-

F¯ar¯ab¯ı, added the fourth book of the *Meteora* (the subject of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s

fifth inquiry), in the Greek–Latin translation of Henricus Aristippus,

and translated two chapters of Avicenna’s *Shifa¯ ’* to supply the topic

of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s sixth inquiry: namely, minerals.13 Alfred went on to

translate Nicholas of Damascus’ *De Plantis*, which was attributed

to Aristotle and corresponded to al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s seventh inquiry, and,

finally, Michael Scot completed (before 1220) the series in natural

philosophy by translating the Arabic collection of Aristotle’s nineteen

books on animals (al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s eighth inquiry).14

The main advantage of the Arabic Aristotle over the Greek was

that it was part of a lively tradition of commentary and teaching up

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to the time of the translators themselves. Hence Gerard was able

to translate along with Aristotle’s texts those of his commentators,

both the Greeks, Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius, and their

Arabic successors, al-Kind¯ı and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı. It is likely that the seeds of

writing Latin commentaries were also sown in Toledo (the evidence

of glossed translations of works on medicine and the science of the

stars from the city suggests this), but the first extant examples are

the glosses of Alfred of Shareshill to the *Meteora, On Stones and*

*Minerals* and *On Plants*.15 These were soon supplemented by translations

of the commentaries of Averroes (who had been writing in

C’ ordoba at the same time as Gerard was active in Toledo), in which

the lead seems to have been taken by Michael Scot in the early thirteenth

century. The Long Commentaries of Averroes included the

entire commented text as *lemmata*. Thus the *lemmata* provided

new translations of Aristotle’s *Physics*, *De Caelo*, *De Anima*, and

*Metaphysics* in the early thirteenth century, and scholastic philosophers

could compare alternative interpretations to the Greek–Latin

translations of the same works.16 Finally, now that the translation of

the works of physics and metaphysics had been completed, attention

was turned to other areas of the Aristotelian corpus: the *Rhetoric*,

the *Poetics*, and the *Ethics*. To this task Hermann the German, working

in Toledo, applied himself between 1240 and 1256, translating a

summary of the*Nicomachean Ethics* (the*Summa Alexandrinorum*),

the *Rhetoric* (togetherwith excerpts from Arabic commentators), and

Averroes’Middle Commentary on the *Poetics*, which substituted for

Aristotle’s own work on the subject.

Arabic texts, therefore, contributed massively to the building up of

a coherent curriculum of Aristotelian philosophy, represented by the

numerous manuscripts of the *Corpus Vetustius* and *Corpus Recentius*,

which was to remain at the center of university training for

many centuries to come. The fact that they were *Arabic*, and issued

from Muslim lands, did not cause a problem. They were simply the

best texts available, and Averroes provided the most dependable and

comprehensive commentaries on Aristotle’s works. If there were

errors, they were errors of philosophers in general, and not of Arabic

philosophers in distinction to Latin philosophers. For scholastic

philosophers Latin was the sole medium of their scholarship, and different

translations of the same text were welcomed as providing different

ways of getting to the “truth” of Aristotle.17 The translators,

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from Gerard of Cremona, through Alfred of Shareshill, to Michael

Scot and Hermann the German, had filled in the gaps in knowledge

among the Latins and, through their translation and interpretation,

had recovered the ancient and perennial wisdom.

But from our perspective we can see that the Arabic origins of

this restitution of Aristotle had a decisive effect on the *nature* of

the medieval curriculum in philosophy. Greek manuscripts provided

the raw texts of Aristotle’s works. But the Arabic tradition supplied

not the “pure” Aristotle of the fourth century B.C.E., but rather, as

Cristina D’Ancona has shown in this volume, the late Neoplatonic

curriculum, in which Aristotle’s metaphysics was crowned with a

rational theology issuing from the Platonic tradition. Hence the *De*

*Causis* could naturally be incorporated into a corpus of Aristotle’s

works. These Neoplatonic elements can be seen even more clearly

in other texts of Arabic philosophy which were never integrated into

the Aristotelian corpus.

arabic traditions independent of the

aristotelian corpus

The second trajectory stemming from Toledo follows a parallel

course to the first. Its beginnings might be seen in the translation

of a short treatise “on the difference between the spirit and the soul”

by Qust.a¯ ibn Lu¯ qa¯ ,made by John of Seville for Raymond, archbishop

of Toledo (1125–52). Here a medical account of the corporeal spirit is

juxtaposedwith a commentary on the definitions of the soul by Plato

and Aristotle respectively. Noteworthy is the fact that Aristotle is

not privileged, but given as an authority in the company of Plato

(whose *Phaedo* and *Timaeus* are mentioned), Theophrastus, Empedocles,

and Galen. The choice of text may have been made because

of the relevance of psychology to theology, in which the nature of

the individual human soul was much discussed. But Qust. ¯a’s work

was not only picked up immediately in the work of scholars operating

in Spain, from Petrus Alfonsi, through Hermann of Carinthia, to

Gundisalvi; it also set in motion the translation of a whole series of

texts on the soul and the human intellect. First, Avicenna’s *On the*

*Soul*, and texts on the intellect by Alexander of Aphrodisias, al-Kind¯ı,

and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, all apparently translated in the circle of Gundisalvi;

then two texts on the conjunction of the intellect within man with

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the active intellect by Averroes and one by his son, Abu¯ Muh. ammad

‘Abdall¯ah, translated in the early thirteenth century; and finally the

Long Commentary on Aristotle’s *De Anima* by Averroes. The intellect

was a subject which Aristotle was thought to have failed to

discuss,18 and the controversy aroused in theWest by Averroes’ supposed

opinion that the potential and the active intellect are both

single entities outside man is well known.19

Avicenna’s *On the Soul* is part of his *Kita¯b al-shifa¯ ’*, which provided

an up-to-date and easily accessible account of logic, mathematics,

physics, and metaphysics. It took into account the opinions

of the doctors of medicine (Avicenna, after all, had also written the

medical encyclopedia, the *Canon of Medicine*). As well as describing

the function of each of the five “outer senses” of sight, hearing,

smell, taste, and touch, Avicenna also set up a system of five “inner

senses,” common sense, imagination, the cogitative faculty, estimation,

and memory; these held different positions within the brain.

This orderly arrangement of faculties, in which physiology and psychology

were brought together, had no equivalent in Aristotle, but

owed more to Galen, and was to have a great appeal among Western

scholars.20

Another item that achieved prominence was metaphysics, or the

concern with the first causes of things. The direct knowledge of

Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in the Latin scholarship in the twelfth century

is meager. The first translation was probably made in themiddle

of the twelfth century by James of Venice, possibly in Constantinople.

But only the first four books of James of Venice’s translation

survive (in two twelfth-century manuscripts and some later ones).21

Only in the thirteenth century is there evidence of a proliferation

of versions and copies of the *Metaphysics*, with the appearance of

the lemmatized text translated with Averroes’ Long Commentary,

the *Translatio Composita* (or *Metaphysica Vetus*), and finally the

version of William of Moerbeke.

Latin scholars had always known of the existence of Aristotle’s

work. This was largely through Boethius, who, at various points in

his two commentaries on Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* and his commentary

on the *Categories*, refers to “further discussion” in *libri*

*quos* [*Aristoteles*] *meta ta phisica inscripsit*. Already in manuscripts

of Boethius’ works the three Greek words *meta ta physica* were

combined into one *metaphisica*, and twelfth-century scholars, such

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as Abelard and the author of the *Liber Sex Principiorum*, quoting

Boethius, refer simply to the *Metaphysica*.22 But Latin philosophers

of the twelfth century drew their metaphysics from other

sources.

It has already been mentioned that, for this subject, Gerard of

Cremona translated an Arabic text based on the *Elements of Theology*

of Proclus, namely, the *De Causis*. This work was copied and

diffused more quickly than any other translation by Gerard,23 and

survives in numerous manuscripts (ca. 250). The popularity of the

*De Causis* represents a general interest in metaphysics which dates

at least from the early years of the twelfth century, when Adelard

of Bath promises to discuss “*nous* [intellect], *hule* [matter], the simple

forms and pure elements” and “the beginning or beginnings (of

things).”24 In the last phrase Adelard is probably deliberately recalling

the words of Plato’s *Timaeus*, the principal text on natural philosophy

before the rediscovery of Aristotle’s *Libri Naturales*, in which

the fictional “Timaeus” refuses to talk “de universitatis vel initio

vel initiis” (Plato, *Timaeus*, 48C). But, whether or not Adelard fulfilled

his promise (we have no evidence that he did), other scholars

did rise to the challenge.

Honorius Augustodunensis (first half of the twelfth century)

revived the ninth-century Neoplatonic metaphysics of Scotus Eriugena

by paraphrasing his *Periphyseon*. But Hermann of Carinthia

turned to Arabic sources. In 1143 he wrote a cosmology which he

called the *De Essentiis* (*On the Essences*).25 The whole of the first

section of this work is devoted to exploring the nature of the First

Cause. It is a concise essay on metaphysics. Hermann starts by defining

what things “are”; these “essences” are comprised under five

genera: cause, movement, place, time, and *habitudo*. There are three

principles: the efficient cause, that “from which” (the formal cause),

and that “in which” (the material cause). The efficient cause in turn

is divided into a “first or primordial cause” and a “secondary cause.”

The primordial cause is the same as Aristotle’s Prime Mover, the

Demiurge of Plato’s *Timaeus*, and the Christian God. There follow

the proofs of his existence: by revelation, and by deduction from

composite and moving things. The essay ends with a definition of

the two movements of the primordial cause: creation, which is of

*principles*, created from nothing and occurring at the beginning of

time, and generation, which is of *things*, generated from the principles,

and being continuous up to the present day. In generation

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God uses an instrument, which is the “secondary cause,” and which

turns out to be the created universe itself. Hermann derives much

of his terminology and some of his arguments from the first chapter

of Boethius’ *Arithmetic* (the definition of “essences”), and the *Vetus*

*Logica*. His argument that the primordial cause must be the *causa*

*et ratio* for everything else, on the other hand, recalls a well-known

phrase in Plato’s *Timaeus*, the dialogue onwhich the*Onthe Essences*

is modeled.26 But what is most striking is how he uses Arabic sources

for developing his argument. The very idea of five essences recalls

similar lists of five basic principles in al-R¯az¯ı, Pseudo-Apollonius,

and al-Kind¯ı.27 But other sources are explicitly named. The most

significant of these is the *Great Introduction to Astrology* of Abu¯

Ma‘shar (787–886), which Hermann had translated in 1140, three

years before writing the *On the Essences*. Abu¯ Ma‘shar’s use of

Aristotelian philosophy was recognized and described in detail by

Richard Lemay.28 The Arabic astrologer does not mention any work

of Aristotle by name, and none of his several citations of the “Philosopher”

follows a text inAristotle verbatim. Nevertheless, most of the

first part of his eight-part book, on the validity of astrology, on the

way the stars act on this world, and on forms, elements, composition,

and the results of composition, is imbuedwith Aristotelian philosophy.

In his discussion of the First Cause, Hermann quotes Abu¯

Ma‘shar’s words that “the generating cause is prior to everything

that is generated.”29 Another phrase in the same discussion quotes

one of Abu¯ Ma‘shar’s authorities: “For this, according to Hermes the

Persian, formis the adornment of matter, but matter is the necessity

of form.”30

The section on metaphysics in the *On the Essences* was, in turn,

a major source for Dominicus Gundisalvi’s *On the Procession of*

*the World*.31 This work is concerned with how one can come to an

understanding of God’s existence, and the different ways in which

things are caused by God and his creatures. While in Hermann we

have seen how Arabic sources are brought in to corroborate and supplement

Latin ones, in the *On the Procession of the World* we see a

continuation of this process: Gundisalvi exploits translations made

on his own initiative, and those of his fellow Toledans, of works

by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, Avicenna, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, and Ibn Gabirol. In addition, his

arguments appear to be influenced by another work of which a Latin

translation was not made: namely, *Kita¯b al-‘aqı¯da al-rafı¯‘a* (*Book of*

*the Exalted Faith*) of Abraham ibn Da’ud.32

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Abraham ibn Da’ud was a Jewish scholar who fled from C’ ordoba

to Toledo because of the persecution of the Almohads shortly before

1160, and there wrote several texts on philosophy, astronomy, and

history, in Arabic and Hebrew. It is very likely that he is the “Avendeuch

Israhelita” who wrote a letter, addressed to a prospective (but

unnamed) patron, advertising the fact that he intended to translate

Avicenna’s *al-Shifa¯ ’*, and including translations of two sample passages.

It seems as if he was successful in securing the patronage of

the archbishop of Toledo, for we next encounter himas collaborating

with archdeacon Gundisalvi on the translation of Avicenna’s *On the*

*Soul*. The other texts that Gundisalvi translated may also reflect the

scholarship of Jewish philosophers in Spain. The substantial work

*Fons Vitae* was written by the Jewish mystic and poet, Solomon ibn

Gabirol, while Avicenna and al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı were the main philosophical

authorities of Ibn Da’ud.33

Thus, in Toledo, we can see, running parallel, first, a program of

translating Aristotle with his Arabic commentators, inaugurated by

Gerard of Cremona. This program reflects the interest of Muslim

philosophers in al-Andalus, among which al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s literal interpretation

and commentary on Aristotle was possibly already introduced

in the late ninth century, and followed by Ibn B¯ajja in eleventhcentury

Saragossa and Averroes in late twelfth-century C’ ordoba.34

Second, there is a program of translating works of the Avicennian

tradition, favored by Jewish scholars in Islamic Spain, directed by

Dominicus Gundisalvi.35 There was some overlap between these

two programs, since Gundisalvi and Gerard sometimes translated

the same works, such as al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s *On the Classification of the Sciences*,

Isaac Israeli’s *On Definitions*, and al-Kind¯ı’s *On the Intellect*.

Moreover, both were inspired by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s *Classification*: Gerard

to translate the Aristotelian texts listed by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, Gundisalvi to

write his *On the Division of Philosophy*, of which al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s text

is the main source.36 But the very fact that there are two separate

translations of some texts indicates that the two programs were separate.

Michael Scot brought together the two traditions by translating

both Aristotle’s *On Animals* from Arabic, and by translating

the equivalent section on zoology in the *Shifa¯ ’*. Hermann the

German used both the Arabic commentators, al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and Averroes,

and the *Shifa¯ ’* to complement his translation of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*,

and this combination of the results of the two Toledan traditions

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is characteristic of scholastic philosophers of the thirteenth century

and afterward.

the thirteenth century

In the thirteenth century in general the barrier between Arabic and

Latin scholarship was more porous than it had ever been. We see

not so much tributaries from the Tigris and Euphrates, but rivers

running directly into Latin channels, and spreading out into an alluvial

plain. There were several reasons for this. First, in Spain Arabic

had become the language of the intellectual classes of Toledo and of

the nobility, thanks to the ascendancy of the Mozarabic community

and their influence over the settlers from northern Spain and further

afield. Second, in Sicily and southern Italy, Arabic-speaking scholars

were encouraged to collaborate with Jews and Christians, thanks

to the support of Frederick II and the intellectual vibrancy of his

court. Third, the popes for the first time showed an active interest

in promoting scholarship of the highest kind, whether in Rome or in

Viterbo. Finally, throughout the Mediterranean as a whole there was

a greater exchange of ideas than there had ever been before.

Some results of this situation were that, instead of simply making

a literal translation of a single text from Arabic, Latin scholars

used a whole range of Arabic texts (which they read in Arabic) to

compose their Latin works. We have already seen how Hermann

supplemented his version of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* with Arabic commentaries

of which there are no independent Latin translations.

At the same time Pedro Gallego, bishop of Cartagena (1250–67),

compiled a text on zoology, in which, aside from using Aristotle’s

and Avicenna’s *On Animals*, he gives passages from the Middle

Commentary of Averroes and a lost work on the *On Animals* by

Abu¯ al-Faraj ibn al-T. ayyib (d. 1043). Gonzalo Pe’ rez “Gudiel” (d.

1299), of Mozarabic stock and an Arabic speaker, in his positions

as bishop of Burgos, archbishop of Toledo, and cardinal at Rome,

and finally as the founder of the university of Alcal’a de Henares

(1294), not only commissioned translations of parts of the *Shifa¯ ’*, but

also collected Arabic manuscripts and Latin and vernacular translations

of Arabic texts. He was accompanied by Alvaro of Toledo,

who translated an Arabic astrological text, and wrote commentaries

and glosses on other Latin translations of Arabic cosmological

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and astrological texts which show that he was reading Arabic texts

directly (including, probably, al-Ghaza¯ lı¯’s *Taha¯ fut al-fala¯ sifa*).Meanwhile,

in Barcelona, Ram’on Mart’ı (ca. 1220–ca. 1285) was drawing

on a wide range of Arabic philosophical texts: in his *Pugio Fidei*

he cites (aside from those works already well known in the Latin) al-

Fa¯ ra¯bı¯’s commentary on the *Physics*, Avicenna’s *Kita¯b al-isha¯ ra¯ t wa*

*al-tanbı¯ha¯ t* and *Kita¯b al-naja¯ t*, al-Ra¯zı¯’s *Shuku¯ k ‘ala¯ Ja¯ lı¯nu¯ s* (*Doubts*

*aboutGalen*), al-Ghaza¯ lı¯’s *Taha¯ fut*, *al-Munqidhmin al-d. ala¯ l*,*Mı¯za¯n*

*al-‘amal*, *al-Mishka¯ t al-anwa¯ r*, *Ih. ya’ ‘ulu¯m al-dı¯n, Kita¯b al-tawba*

and *al-maqs.*

*ad al-asna¯ fı¯ asma¯ ’ Alla¯h al-h. usna¯* , as well as Averroes’

*Taha¯ fut al-taha¯ fut* and *al-damı¯ma*.37 His pupil, Arnald of Villanova,

could also read Arabic, and as well as translating Avicenna’s *On*

*Medicines for the Heart* and Galen’s *On Palpitation* (*De Crepitatione*),

appears to have used Arabic texts directly in his original

writings.38 The supreme example of this process occurs in the case

of Alfonso X (*el Sabio* “the Wise”) who, even before he became king

of Le ’on and Castile in 1252, was sponsoring translations of texts

from Arabic, and compilations on individual subjects based on a

wide range of Arabic texts. His principal interests, however, were

in astronomy, astrology, magic, and Islamic law codes, and the resultant

texts, in Castilian, have only incidental relevance to philosophy,

such as the statement at the beginning of a text on the properties of

stones and gems attributed to Aristotle, “who was the most perfect of

all the philosophers.” The *Secret of Secrets*, purportedly Aristotle’s

advice on political philosophy to his pupil Alexander the Great, was

also translated into Castilian before the end of the thirteenth century.

Many of the Arabic texts used by Alfonso X may have come into

his possession after the fall of C’ ordoba (1236) and Seville (1248); in

the latter city he attempted to set up a school of “Arabic and Latin.”

The translations of the commentaries of Averroes show a particularly

clear example of “internationalism.” The works of Averroes

arose within the context of Andalusian Aristotelianism, which

we have already sketched in respect to the translation program of

Gerard of Cremona; from the same context comes al-Bit.

ru¯ jı¯’s rejection

of Ptolemaic astronomy in favor of an explanation of the movements

of the heavenly bodies which is compatible with Aristotle’s

physics. Within a surprisingly short period after Averroes’ death his

works were being translated by both Christian and Jewish scholars,

sponsored especially by Frederick II. Michael Scot, who is said to

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have known Hebrew as well as Arabic, translated, as a sequence of

texts on cosmology, al-Bit.

ru¯ jı¯’s work and Averroes’ Long Commentary

on Aristotle’s *De Caelo*.

The writings of Albertus Magnus in particular show a knowledge

of several Arabic philosophical texts of which we do not have evidence

of full translations into Latin, such as al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s commentaries

on Aristotle’s logic and physics, which may have reached him

through this process of seepage through a porous wall, and a similar

situation can be observed in the case of his fellow Dominican,

Arnold of Saxony.39

The spread of Arabic philosophical works in the thirteenth century,

as evidenced by their existence in libraries, has been comprehensively

documented by Harald Kischlat.40 The preeminence

of Arabic sources for Western philosophy can be seen in the fact

that, when Giles of Rome criticizes the errors of the philosophers,41

all the philosophers named are Arabic or wrote their philosophy in

Arabic (Maimonides), with the exception of Aristotle himself. Even

in the case of Aristotle, Giles uses the Arabic–Latin translations

of the *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and the *De Anima*, since he takes

them from the lemmatized texts in the Long Commentaries of

Averroes (the Greek–Latin *Physics* is also used). He also uses Alfred

of Shareshill’s translation of the Pseudo-Aristotelian *De Plantis*.

para-philosophical works

Onemight be surprised to find, as one of the books from which Giles

of Rome takes philosophers’ errors, a workwith the title *On the Theory*

*of the Magic Arts* (*De Theorica Artium Magicarum*). What has

magic to dowith philosophy? The work was, in fact, attributed to the

well-known “philosopher of the Arabs” al-Kind¯ı, although neither

was al-Kind¯ı known as the “philosopher of the Arabs” to Latin scholars,

nor has *On the Theory of the Magic Arts* been found in Arabic.

The presence of its doctrines42 among the “errors of the philosophers,”

however, does alert us to strands of philosophical thought

which were conveyed neither through the main-line Peripatetic tradition,

nor through Avicenna.

We must be aware that our own conception of philosophy is different

from *philosophia* in theMiddleAges, which in turn is not a stable

term. It migrates, for example, from being applied by Latin scholars

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to the seven liberal arts, to being split into the “three philosophies”

(moral, natural, and “first” philosophy or metaphysics) of

the scholastic period. Gundisalvi in two works (including the translation

*On the Rise of the Sciences*) describes the “particular divisions

of natural philosophy” as “astrological judgements, medicine,

natural necromancy, talismans, agriculture, navigation, alchemy,

and perspective,” most of which we would hardly consider philosophical.

Nevertheless, we have to bear in mind that Arabic philosophical

ideas were transmitted via texts on these subjects as well,

even though they were not incorporated in the teaching curriculum

of *philosophia* at the universities. The indebtedness of Abu¯

Ma‘shar’s *Great Introduction to Astrology* not only to Aristotle’s

works on natural philosophy, but also to his logical works, has

become increasingly obvious to scholars, and the first seven chapters

also of M¯ash¯a’all ¯ah’s *On the Elements and Orbs* are an exposition

of celestial physics. Medicine, notoriously described by Isidore as

a “second philosophy,” was also a conveyor of philosophical ideas,

especially in regard to the elements of bodies and to ethics. “Natural

necromancy,” by which Gundisalvi would have meant the art

of harnessing the occult forces in nature, especially through the

use of talismans (which is his next division), appealed to the authority

of Aristotle and Plato, and adapted Aristotle’s words on the

relation of soul to body to that of the spiritual force within the

talisman.43 In agriculture and navigation the impact of Arabic learning

did not occur until a later period. But alchemy provides a rich and

largely unexploited hunting ground for Arabic philosophical ideas.

This includes the *On the Soul* of Pseudo-Avicenna and the underpinning

Hermetic philosophy of bonds between all parts of the universe,

and, in general, of a “biological” view of generation, involving

at every level themixture between male and female principles,which

can be found inHugo of Santalla’s translation of Pseudo-Apollonius’

*On the Secrets of Creation*. Finally, the science of perspective, or

“how one sees things,” described for the first time in theWest in the

Latin versions of al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s *On the Classification of the Sciences*,

combined mathematics with physics and medicine, and, through

the anonymous translation of Ibn al-Haytham’s magisterial *Optics*,

engendered a tradition of writing on perspective that engaged some

of the West’s greatest scholars, Witelo, John Peckham, and Roger

Bacon.

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late medieval and renaissance translations

of arabic philosophical works

Direct Latin translations from Arabic texts continued to be made in

the fourteenth century. Among these are those of Ibn al-Haytham’s

*On the Configuration of the World*, surviving in a single Toledan

manuscript (Madrid, Biblioteca nacional, MS. 10059), and Averroes’

*Incoherence of the Incoherence*, translated by a scholar variously

called “Calo the Jew” and “Calonymos ha-Nasi” for Robert of Anjou,

king of Naples, in 1328. At the same time, however, that Calo the Jew

was translating an Arabic text into Latin, Calonymos ben Calonymos

(who may or may not be the same scholar) was translating a

large number of scientific and philosophical texts from Arabic into

Hebrew, and after this time there was a shift from translating directly

from Arabic into translating the Hebrew versions of Arabic texts.

From the earliest period Jewish scholars had always played an

important role in introducing and interpreting Arabic texts for

Christian scholars writing in Latin. We have already seen the significance

of Avendauth and the Andalusian Jewish philosophical tradition

for Gundisalvi. Alfred of Shareshill expressed his debt to the

Jew Solomon, andMichael Scot was criticized by Roger Bacon for not

knowing his source language sufficiently but relying on a converted

Jew called “Andrew” (we know that he used the services of a Jew

called “Abuteus” in translating al-Bit.

ru¯ jı¯).

As part of the humanist movement in Italy from the late fifteenth

century onwards, scholars returned to Greek and Arabic sources,

both to discover texts that had never been translated into Latin

before, and to improve the quality of extant medieval Latin translations

(which they regarded as being written in barbarous Latin). Thus,

at the turn of the sixteenth century, Andrea Alpago revised Gerard of

Cremona’s translation of Avicenna’s *Canon of Medicine* by consulting

manuscripts inDamascus, and, at the same time, translated some

short philosophical texts by Avicenna which had never been translated

before. Particular interest was shown in the works of Averroes,

but in this case scholars turned to Hebrew versions. At least thirtyeight

of Averroes’ commentaries were translated into Hebrew from

the early thirteenth century onwards, and Jewish scholars such as

Levi ben Gerson (Gersonides) wrote “super”-commentaries on some

of these commentaries. The reasons for translating Hebrew versions

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included the facts that first, Christian scholars of the Renaissance

were more likely to know Hebrew than Arabic because of their interest

in both Biblical studies and the mystical Kabbalah; second, that

Jewish scholars were available to help them, especially after the

expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492; and third, that Hebrew

was regarded as being so close to Arabic that it did not really matter

whether an Arabic work was translated from Hebrew rather than

directly from Arabic.44

Most of the translations from Hebrew into Latin were made by

Jewish scholars, the most prolific of whom was Jacob Mantino

(d. 1549). The ambitious editors of the complete works of Aristotle

with all the commentaries of Averroes, published in eleven volumes

from 1550 to 1552 by the Giunta brothers in Venice, commissioned

Mantino to revise earlier translations of Averroes and provide

new translations. The Giuntine edition added further philosophical

works by Arabic authors, including some short letters on logicwhich

have not yet been identified. But it was published just at the time

when two interrelated developments in European intellectual culture

were getting under way. The first of these was the study and

publication of texts in their original languages, which led, in 1584,

to the setting up of an Arabic press in Rome by Giovan Battista

Raimondi. The second was the separation of the study of Arabic

texts from the mainstream of European academic education. From

themid-thirteenth to themid-sixteenth century at least, students of

philosophy in Western Europe, following the Peripatetic tradition,

used the works of Avicenna, al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, and Averroes as an integral

part of their syllabus. In the course of the sixteenth century chairs in

Arabic began to be set up in European universities, and the foundations

for the modern discipline of Oriental Studies were laid. But this

professionalism in the study of Arabic marked the end of the period

in which Arabic philosophy was part of the fabric of the European

intellectual tradition.

notes

1 Adelard of Bath, *Questions on Natural Science*, in Adelard of Bath, *Conversations*

*with his Nephew*, ed. and trans. C. Burnett (Cambridge: 1998),

82–3 and 90–1 for references to Arabic studies. An “old man” (*senex*) in

Tarsus gave a practical demonstration to Adelard that the human body

is made of a web of nerves and blood vessels (ibid., 122–3).

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2 Preface to the fourth book of the *Liber Mamonis*, ed. in C. Burnett,

“Antioch as a Link between Arabic and Latin Culture in the Twelfth and

Thirteenth Centuries,” in A. Tihon, I. Draelants, and B. van den Abeele

(eds.), *Occident et Proche-Orient: contacts scientifiques au temps des*

*croisades* (Louvain-la-Neuve: 2000), 1–78 (see 56).

3 H. Suter, *Beitra¨ ge zur Geschichte der Mathematik bei den Griechen*

*und Arabern* (Erlangen: 1922), 7–8. Frederick’s personal contact with

Arabic teachers is discussed in C. Burnett, “The ‘Sons of Averroes with

the Emperor Frederick’ and theTransmission of the PhilosophicalWorks

by Ibn Rushd,” in Aertsen and Endress [134], 259–99.

4 M.-T. d’Alverny, “Avicenne et les m’edecins de Venise,” *Medioevo e*

*Rinascimento: studi in onore di Bruno Nardi* (Florence, 1955), 177–98

(see 185).

5 See O. Gutman, “On the Fringes of the *Corpus Aristotelicum*: The

Pseudo-Avicenna *Liber Celi et Mundi*,” *Early Science and Medicine*

2 (1997), 109–28.

6 Scholars ofWestern philosophy often mistakenly call Avicenna’s *Shifa¯* ’

a “commentary” on Aristotle. This is not so, andAvicenna never implies

this, but rather refers to his work as “a comprehensive work arranged

in the order which will occur to me.” The relation of the work to that

of Aristotle is mentioned only in the introduction to the Latin translation

of the section on the soul: “the author . . . has collected together

what Aristotle said in his books *On the Soul, On Sense and What is*

*Sensed*, and *On Intellect and What is Intellected*.” See Hasse [251],

1 and 6.

7 See C. Burnett, “Physics before the *Physics*: Early Translations from

Arabic of Texts Concerning Nature in MSS British Library, Additional

22719 and Cotton Galba E IV,” *Medioevo* 27 (2002), 53–109. The last

work examines the nature of the supposedly occult effects of talismans.

8 See D. Elford, “William of Conches,” in *A History of Twelfth-Century*

*Western Philosophy*, ed. P. Dronke (Cambridge: 1988), 308–27. The discussion

of the elements at the beginning of the *Pantegni* was especially

important in this respect.

9 The richest discussions of this process remain those in the articles of

Lorenzo Minio Paluello, collected in his *Opuscula: The Latin Aristotle*

(Amsterdam: 1972).

10 The list is edited and discussed in detail in Burnett [245].

11 In the following paragraph the order of texts is that given by the *socii*, and

is not necessarily the chronological order followed by Gerard himself,

none of whose translations is dated.

12 For a recent conjecture concerning the origin of the *De Causis*, see M.

Zonta, “L’autore del *De Causis* pseudo-aristotelico: una nuova ipotesi,”

in R. B. Finazzi and A. Valvo (eds.), *La diffusione dell’eredita` classica*

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*nell’eta` tardoantica e medievale: il “Romanzo di Alessandro” e altri*

*scritti* (Alessandria: 1998), 323–30.

13 The four books of the *Meteora* were combined with these two (in

Latin, three) chapters, and the whole was supplied with a commentary

by Alfred: this implies that Alfred was responsible for the

combination.

14 The Arabic collection included the *Generation of Animals*, the *Parts of*

*Animals*, and the *History of Animals*, but not the two short works that

completed the Greek corpus.

15 For these glosses see J. K. Otte, *Alfred of Sareshel: Commentary on*

*the Metheora of Aristotle* (Leiden: 1988); G. Freibergs (ed.), *Aspectus et*

*Effectus: Festschrift for Richard Dales* (New York: 1993), 105–11; and

R. French, “Teaching Meteorology in Thirteenth-Century Oxford: The

Arabic Paraphrase,” *Physis* 36 (1999), 99–129.

16 Quite frequently these Arabic–Latin versions appear in the margins of

the Greek–Latin translations of Aristotle’s *Libri Naturales*.

17 It is noticeable that a scholar such as Albert the Great would refer to a

*vetus translatio* and a *nova translatio*, but not to *Graeca interpretatio*

and a *Saracenica interpretatio*.

18 Cf. Abu¯ Muh. ammad ‘Abdalla¯h ibn Rushd (the son of Averroes), *On*

*the Conjunction*, (2): “This is that question which the Philosopher

promised to explain in his *De Anima* [i.e., *De Anima*, III.7, 431b17–19],

but that explanation has not come down to us”: C. Burnett, “The ‘Sons

of Averroes,’” 287. See also chapter 9 above.

19 See Davidson [208].

20 Hasse [251], 127–53.

21 At about the same time, another translator made an independent translation

from Greek, known as the *Translatio Anonyma* or *Metaphysica*

*Media*, which I have suggested elsewhere may have been made in the

context of a group of translators associated with Antioch, whose work

had little impact: see C. Burnett, “A Note on the Origins of the *Physica*

*Vaticana* and the *Metaphysica Media*,” in R. Beyers et al. (eds.), *Tradition*

*et traduction: les textes philosophiques et scientifiques grecs au*

*moyen aˆ ge latin. Hommage a` Fernand Bossier* (Leuven: 1999), 59–69.

22 G. Vuillemin-Diem, *Metaphysica lib. I–XIV, Recensio et Translatio*

*Guillelmi de Moerbeka*, 2 vols. (Leiden: 1995).

23 It was copied into an English manuscript before 1200 (MS. Oxford,

Selden supra 24) and known to Alexander Nequam at about the same

date.

24 Adelard, *Questiones Naturales*, 226: *de NOY, de hyle, de simplicibus*

*formis, de puris elementis . . . de initio vel initiis*.

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25 Hermann sets forth the principles of his metaphysics in *De Essentiis*,

58vB–60rE (ed. C. Burnett [Leiden: 1982], 76–88), but develops specific

themes throughout the work.

26 *Omne autem quod gignitur ex causa aliqua necessario gignitur; nihil*

*enim fit cuius ortum non legitima causa et ratio praecedat* (Plato,

*Timaeus*, 28A).

27 Al-Kind¯ı’s text *De Quinque Essentiis* was translated by Gerard of

Cremona, but substitutes “matter” for *habitudo*.

28 R. Lemay, *Abu Ma‘shar and Latin Aristotelianism in the Twelfth Century*

(Beirut: 1962). For a recent analysis of Abu¯ Ma‘shar’s philosophical

position see P. Adamson, “Abu¯ Ma‘shar, al-Kindı¯ and the Philosophical

Defense of Astrology,” *Recherches de philosophie et th´eologie*

*m´edi ´evales* 69 (2002), 245–70.

29 *Omni quoque genito causa genitrix antiquior* (Hermann of Carinthia,

*De Essentiis*, 80). This phrase is attributed to “the Philosopher” in bk. 1,

ch. 4 of Abu¯ Ma‘shar’s*Great Introduction*, ed. R. Lemay, 9 vols. (Naples:

1995–6), vol. II, 39 (Arabic) and vol. VIII, 12 (Hermann’s translation).

30 *Sic enim apud Hermetem Persam: forma quidem ornatus est materie;*

*materia vero forme necessitas*: cf. bk. V, ch. 4 of Abu¯ Ma‘shar, *Great*

*Introduction*, vol. I, 313, and vol. VIII, 76.

31 Dominicus Gundissalinus, *The Procession of theWorld (De Processione*

*Mundi)*, trans. J. A. Laumakis (Milwaukee: 2002).

32 M. Alonso, “Las fuentes literarias de Domingo Gundisalvo,” *Al-*

*Andalus* 11 (1946), 159–73; Laumakis (see previous note), 14–15.

33 The *Liber de Causis* was also attributed to “Avendauth” in its earliest

manuscript (Oxford, Selden supra 24), and, in its Arabic form, is cited

mainly by Jewish philosophers in Spain (including Ibn Gabirol): see R.

Taylor, “The *Kal ¯ am f¯ı Mah.*

*d.*

*al-Khair* (*Liber de Causis*) in the Islamic

Philosophical Milieu,” in Kraye, Ryan, and Schmitt [60], 37–52, at 41.

34 See D. Gutas, “Aspects of Literary Form in Arabic Logical Works,” in

Burnett [50], 54–5.

35 M. Zonta, “Avicenna in Medieval Jewish Philosophy,” in Janssens and

de Smet [97], 267–79, at 267–9, points out the dependence of Andalusian

Jewish scholars, from the first half of the twelfth century onward, on

works by Avicenna and al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı (Judah Halevi, Joseph ibn Saddiq, and

above all, Abraham ibn Da’ud).

36 Gundisalvi was also probably responsible for translating al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s

*Directing Attention to the Way to Happiness*, which is an exhortation

to the study of philosophy, whose message is repeated at the beginning

of his *On the Division of Philosophy*: “to wisdom pertain all those

[sciences] which either illuminate the soul of man for the recognition

of truth, or which ignite it toward the love of goodness, and all these

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are the sciences of philosophy” (ed. L. Baur, *Beitra¨ ge zur Geschichte der*

*Philosophie des Mittelalters*, vol. IV, parts 2–3 [Mu‥ nster: 1903], 5). For

Gundisalvi’s significance in general see A. Fidora, *Die Wissenschaftstheorie*

*des Dominicus Gundissalinus* (Berlin: 2003).

37 A. Cortabarria, “La connaissance de textes arabes chez Raymond Martin

O.P. et sa position en face de l’Islam,” *Cahiers de Fanjeaux* 18 (1983),

279–300.

38 J. Paniagua, *Studia Arnaldiana* (Barcelona: 1994), 319–34.

39 I. Draelents, “Arnold de Saxe,” *Bulletin de philosophie m´edi ´evale* 34

(1992), 164–80, and 35 (1993), 130–49.

40 Kischlat [252].

41 Giles of Rome, *Errores Philosophorum: Critical Text with Notes and*

*Introduction*, ed. J. Koch, trans. J. O. Riedl (Milwaukee: 1944); written

ca. 1270, according to Koch.

42 These include: “the future depends simply and without qualification

upon the state of the supercelestial bodies”; “all things happen of necessity”;

“heavenly harmony alone brings all things to pass”; “the form

imaged in the mind exercises causality over things outside the mind”;

“prayers addressed to God and to spiritual creatures have a natural efficacy

for conserving what is good and excluding what is evil.”

43 See *Picatrix*, ed. D. Pingree (London: 1986), I.v.36.

44 These points are illustrated in C. Burnett, “The Second Revelation of

Arabic Philosophy and Science: 1492–1562,” in C. Burnett and A. Contadini

(eds.), *Islamand the Italian Renaissance* (London: 1999), 185–98.

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*Arabic philosophical works translated into Latin before ca. 1600*

In the following table, the translations are arranged according to

the chronological order of the author in the Arabic original. In the

second column the Latin translator is named, and a date and place

for the translation is given when it is known. Works that have not

survived in Arabic, or in the Latin translation, or which have not

been identified, are marked with an asterisk. Translations made via

the intermediary of a Hebrew text are marked with an obelisk.1

The order of works in the list of translations drawn up by Gerard of

Cremona’s students after his death (1187) is given in bold.2 The

most recent editions of the Latin texts have been given; AL =

Aristoteles Latinus; ASL = Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus; AvL =

Avicenna Latinus. For Averroes/Ibn Rushd’s works, the serial

number in Gerhard Endress, “Averrois Opera,” in Aertsen and

Endress [134], 339–81, is given in bold. For Renaissance editions,

the dates of first publication are given. Certain works which

primarily belong to other genres, such as mathematics and

medicine, have been added because they include substantial

discussions of topics germane to falsafa: e.g., Ptolemy’s *Almagest*,

whose first book deals with questions also present in *De Caelo*,

Abu¯ Ma‘shar’s *Great Introduction to Astrology*, which deals with

several issues of physics and logic, and Pseudo-Apollonius’ *On the*

*Secrets of Nature*, which treats of the animal, vegetable, and

mineral kingdoms.

Text Translator

Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* Gerard of Cremona (1; AL IV, 3)

Aristotle, *Rhetoric* Hermann the German (Toledo,

between 1240 and 1250)

Aristotle, *Physics* Gerard of Cremona (**34**; AL VII, 1.2)

Aristotle, *De Caelo* Gerard of Cremona (**35**)

Aristotle, *De Generatione et*

*Corruptione*

Gerard of Cremona (**37**)3

Aristotle, *Meteora*, bks. I–III

(paraphrase of Yah. y¯a ibn al-Bit.

r¯ıq)

Gerard of Cremona (**38**; ASL 12)

Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, a fragment

of the beginning of Alpha Meiz ˆon

Perhaps the same translator as that

of al-Kind¯ı’s *De Radiis*.4

Aristotle, *On Animals* (19 bk.

version)

Michael Scot (before 1220; ASL 5)

(*cont.*)

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(*cont.*)

Text Translator

*Summa Alexandrinorum*

(a compendium from the

*Nicomachean Ethics*)

Hermann the German (Toledo [?],

1243–4)

Pseudo-Aristotle, *On the Pure*

*Good* = Proclus, *Elements of*

*Theology*

Gerard of Cremona (**33**; *De Causis*)5

∗Pseudo-Aristotle, *On the Causes of*

*the Properties of the Four*

*Elements*

Gerard of Cremona (**36**; bk.1 only)6

Pseudo-Aristotle (Nicholas of

Damascus), *On Plants*

Alfred of Shareshill (ca. 1200; ASL 4)

Pseudo-Aristotle, *Theologia* =

Plotinus, *Enneads* (selection)

Moses Arovas and Pier Nicolas

Castellani (1519)

Pseudo-Aristotle, *Secret of Secrets* (a) John of Seville (ca. 1120; partial)7

(b) Philip of Tripoli (ca. 1220;

complete)8

*On the Apple* (*The Death of*

*Aristotle*)

*†*Manfred (ca. 1260; *De Pomo*)9

Ptolemy, *Almagest* (a) Abdelmessie Wittoniensis (ca.

1130)10

(b) Gerard of Cremona (**22**)

Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On the*

*Intellect*

Gundisalvi (?)11

Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Time,*

*On the Senses*, and *That*

*Augment and Increase Occur in*

*Form, not in Matter*

Gerard of Cremona (**39**)12

∗Themistius, Commentary on

*Posterior Analytics*

Gerard of Cremona (**2**)13

∗Themistius, Paraphrase of *De*

*Caelo*

*†*Mos`e Alatino (1574)14

Nemesius, *On the Elements* (= *On*

*the Nature of Man*, ch. 6)

Anonymous (Constantine the

African?)15

Pseudo-Apollonius (Ba¯ lı¯nu¯ s), *On*

*the Secrets of Nature*

Hugo of Santalla (ca. 1150)16

*Kal¯ıla wa Dimna*, translated from

Middle Persian by Ibn al-Muqaffa‘

(a) *†*John of Capua, *Directorium*

*Humanae Vitae* (1263–78)

(b) Raymond of B’eziers (1315)

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(*cont.*)

Text Translator

∗M¯ash¯a’all ¯ah (Messehalla, d. ca.

815), *On the Elements and Orbs*

(*On the Knowledge of the*

*Movement of the Orb*)

Gerard of Cremona (**25**)17

H.

unayn ibn Ish. ¯aq (d. ca. 873), *Witty*

*Sayings of the Philosophers*

*Libro de los buenos proverbios* (no

Latin translation known)

∗*Turba Philosophorum* Anonymous18

Qust.a¯ ibn Lu¯ qa¯ (fl. 9th c., Costaben

Luce), *On the Difference*

*between the Spirit and the Soul*

John of Seville (between 1125 and

1152)19

Qust.a¯ ibn Lu¯ qa¯ , *On Physical*

*Ligatures*

Constantine the African (before

1198)20

Abu¯ Ma‘shar (d. 886, Albumasar),

*Great Introduction to Astrology*

(a) John of Seville and Limia (1133)

(b) Hermann of Carinthia (1140)21

∗al-Kind¯ı (d. after 870, Alkindi), *On*

*the Five Essences*

Gerard of Cremona (**41**)22

al-Kind¯ı, *On Sleep and Vision* Gerard of Cremona (**43**)

al-Kind¯ı, *On the Intellect* (a) Gundisalvi (?) (*De intellectu*)

(b) Gerard of Cremona (*De ratione*)

∗al-Kind¯ı, *Two Letters on Weather*

*Forecasting*

Anonymous (*De mutatione*

*temporum*)23

∗al-Kind¯ı, *On Rays* (*The Theory of*

*the Magic Arts*)

Anonymous (perhaps the same

translator as that of fragment of

Aristotle, *Metaph*. Alpha

Meiz ˆ on)24

al-Kind¯ı, Commentary on

*Almagest*, bk. 1

∗Hugo of Santalla

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı (d. ca. 950, Alfarabi), *On*

*the Classification of the Sciences*

(a) Gundisalvi

(b) Gerard of Cremona (**42**)25

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, *On the Intellect* (a) Gundisalvi (?)26

(b) *†*Abraham de Balmes (Vat. lat.

12055)

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, *Directing Attention to*

*the Way to Happiness* (*K.*

*al-tanbı¯h ‘ala¯ sabı¯l al-sa‘a¯da*)

Gundisalvi (?), *Liber exercitationis*

*ad viam felicitatis*27

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, *The Sources of the*

*Questions* (*‘Uyu¯ n al-masa¯ ’il*)28

Anonymous fragmentary

translation (*Fontes questionum/*

*Flos Alpharabii secundum*

*sententiamAristotelis*)29

(*cont.*)

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(*cont.*)

Text Translator

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, *On* “*De Interpretatione*” Abbreviated excerpts30

∗al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, *On the Syllogism* ∗Gerard of Cremona (**3**),

unidentified in Latin

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, *On* “*Posterior Analytics*” Cited by Albert the Great

∗al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, *Introduction to the Book*

*of Rhetoric* (*S.*

*adr kita¯b*

*al-Khit.*

*a¯ba*)

Hermann the German (*Didascalia*

*in RhetoricamAristotelis ex*

*Glosa Alpharabii*)31

∗al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, *On* “*Physics*” ∗Gerard of Cremona (*Distinctio*

*super Librum Aristotilis de*

*Naturali Auditu*; **40**)32

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, *Explanation of the*

*Problems in the Postulates of the*

*Fifth Book of Euclid*

Gundisalvi (?)33

al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, *On the Perfect State*

(beginning only)

*†*Afonso Dinis of Lisbon and

magister Alfonsus conversus

(Abner of Burgos)?: *De*

*Perfectione Naturali Intellectus*,

chs. 5–634

∗Pseudo-F¯ar¯ab¯ı, *On the Rise of the*

*Sciences*

Unknown 12th-century translator

(Gundisalvi?)

Ikhw¯an al-S. af ¯a’, *Letter on Proof* Anonymous35

Ikhw¯an al-S. af ¯a’, *Letter on*

*Geography*

Anonymous (*Epistola Fratrum*

*Sincerorum in Cosmographia*)36

Ikhw¯an al-S. af ¯a’ *Final Letter Liber de Quattuor Confectionibus*37

∗Isaac Israeli (ca. 855–907), *On the*

*Elements*

Gerard of Cremona (**54**)38

∗Isaac Israeli, *On the Description*

*and Definition of Things*

(a) Dominicus Gundisalvi (?)

(b) Gerard of Cremona (**55**)39

Avicenna (d. 1037, Ibn S¯ın¯ a), *The*

*Healing* (*al-Shifa¯ ’*), prologue of

Juzj ¯an¯ı

Avendauth (with the aid of an

unknown Latinist)40

j1 (Logic), f1 (*Isagoge*), bk. 1, chs. 1

and 12

Avendauth (with the aid of an

unknown Latinist)

j1, f1, bk. 1, chs. 2–11, 13–14, bk. 2,

chs. 1–4

Unknown 12th-century Toledan (?)

translator(s) (not Gundisalvi)

j1, f5 (*Posterior Analytics*), bk. 2,

ch. 7

Gundisalvi (*De Convenientia et*

*Differentia Scientiarum*, within

his *De Divisione Philosophiae*)41

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(*cont.*)

Text Translator

j1, f8 (*Rhetoric*) (excerpts) Within Hermann the German’s

translation of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*

j2 (Natural Science), f1 (*Physics*),

bks. 1–3 (beginning only)

Unknown 12th-century Toledan (?)

translator(s) (AvL)

j2, f1, bks. 3–4 (continuation of

previous translation)42

Juan Gonzalves de Burgos and

Salomon (Burgos, 1275–80; AvL)

j2, f2 (*On the Heavens*) Juan Gonzalves de Burgos and

Salomon (AvL)43

j2, f3 (*On Generation and*

*Corruption*)

Juan Gonzalves de Burgos and

Salomon (AvL)

j2, f4 (*On Actions and Passions*) Juan Gonzalves de Burgos and

Salomon (AvL)

j2, f5, bk. 1, chs. 1 and 5 (*On Stones*

*and Minerals*)

Alfred of Shareshill (ca. 1200; *De*

*Congelatione et Conglutinatione*

*Lapidum*)44

j2, f5, bk. 2, 1–6 (*Meteora*) Juan Gonzalves de Burgos and

Salomon (Burgos, 1275–80)

j2, f5, bk. 2, 6 (*On Floods*) Alfred of Shareshill (?) (ca. 1200)

j2, f6 (*On the Soul*) Avendauth and Gundisalvi (AvL)

j2, f7 (*On Plants*) ∗*Liber eiusdem (Avicenne) de*

*Vegetabilibus*45

j2, f8 (*On Animals*) Michael Scot

j4 (*Metaphysics*) Gundisalvi and an unknown

collaborator (AvL)

Ibn S¯ın¯ a, *Letter on Medicines for*

*the Heart*

(a) chs. 2–7 by Avendauth and

Gundisalvi, inserted into

Avicenna’s *De Anima*46

(b) Arnold of Villanova (ca. 1300)

(c) Andrea Alpago (1527; a revision

of a)

Ibn S¯ın¯ a, *Compendium on the Soul*

*(Maqala f¯ı al-nafs)*

Andrea Alpago (1546; *Compendium*

*de Anima*)47

Ibn S¯ın¯ a, *Treatise on the*

*Destination (of the Soul)* (*Risa¯ la*

*ad.*

*h.*

*awı¯ya fı¯ al-ma‘a¯d*)

Andrea Alpago (1546; *Liber Mahad*)

Ibn S¯ın¯ a, Extracts from *The*

*Marginal Notes (on the Soul)*

(*Ta‘liqa¯ t*)

Andrea Alpago (1546; *Aphorismi de*

*Anima*)

(*cont.*)

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(*cont.*)

Text Translator

Ibn S¯ın¯ a, *Letter on Definitions*

(*Risa¯ la fı¯ al-h. udu¯ d*)

Andrea Alpago (1546; *De*

*Diffinitionibus et Quaesitis*)

Ibn S¯ın¯ a, *Divisions of the*

*Intellectual Sciences* (*Aqsa¯m*

*al-h. ikma*)

Andrea Alpago (1546; *De Divisione*

*Scientiarum*)

∗Pseudo-Ibn S¯ın¯ a, *Book on the*

*Heavens and the World*

Gundisalvi (*Liber Caeli et Mundi*;

ASL 14)

Abu¯ Wafa¯ ’ al-Mubashshir ibn Fa¯ tik,

*Choicest Maxims and Best*

*Sayings* (1048–9)

(a) Gerard of Cremona (the sayings

of Ptolemy, in the preface to the

*Almagest*)

(b) John of Procida (?) (*Liber*

*Philosophorum Moralium*

*Antiquorum*)48

Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı (d. 1111, Algazel),

*Prologue to the Aims and the*

*Destruction of the Philosophers*

Anonymous49

Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, *The Aims of the*

*Philosophers*

Magister Johannes and Gundisalvi

(*Summa Theorice Philosophie*)50

Al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı, *The Destruction of the*

*Philosophers*

Included within Ibn Rushd, *The*

*Destruction of the Destruction*

q.v.

∗Ramon Llull’s Arabic logical

compendium, dependent on the

logic of *The Aims*

Ramon Llull (*Compendium Logicae*

*Algazelis*; Montpellier, 1275–6 or

1288)51

Ibn al-Haytham (965–ca. 1040,

Alhazen) *On the Configuration*

*of the World*

(a) *Liber Mamonis* (Stephen the

Philosopher, mid-12th c.; adds

commentary)

(b) In Oxford, Canon. misc. 45 (late

13th c.)52

(c) In Madrid, BN, 10059 (before

early 14th c.)53

(d) *†*Abraham de Balmes (MS Vat.

lat. 4566)

Ibn al-Haytham, *Optics* Two unknown translators before

the late 13th century54

∗Ibn Gabirol (1021–58 or 1070,

Avicebron), *Fount of Life*

Johannes Hispanus and Gundisalvi

(*Fons Vitae*)

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(*cont.*)

Text Translator

Ibn B¯ajja (d. 1139, Avempace), *Letter*

*of Farewell (Risa¯ lat al-wada¯ ‘)*

*†*Abraham de Balmes (*Epistola*

*Expeditionis*; MS Vat. 3897)

IbnT.

ufayl (ca. 1100–85),*H.*

*ayy ibn*

*Yaqz. a¯n*

*†*Unknown translator (before 1493;

MS Genoa, Bibl. Univ. A.IX.29)

Ibn Rushd (1126–98, Averroes),

*Epitomes on Logic* (1–9)

(a) *†*Abraham de Balmes (1523)

(b) *†*Giovanni Francesco Burana

(1524; *Prior Analytics* only)

Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary on

∗*Isagoge* (10)

(a) William of Luna

(b) *†*Jacob Mantino (1550/2)

Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary on

*Categories* (11)

(a) William of Luna

(b) *†*Jacob Mantino (1550/2)

Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary on

*De Interpretatione* (12)

(a) William of Luna (?)55

(b) *†*Jacob Mantino (1550/2)

Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary on

*Prior Analytics* (13)

(a) William of Luna (?)

(b) *†*Giovanni Francesco Burana

(1524)

Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary on

*Posterior Analytics* (14)

(a) William of Luna (?)

(b) *†*Giovanni Francesco Burana

(1550/2)

Ibn Rushd, Long Commentary on

*Posterior Analytics* (19)

(a) *†*Abraham de Balmes (1523)

(b) *†*Giovanni Francesco Burana

(1550/2)

(c) *†*Jacob Mantino (1562; fragment)

Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary on

*Topics* (15)

(a) *†*Abraham de Balmes (1523)

(b) *†*Jacob Mantino (1550/2; bks.

1–4)

Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary on

*Sophistici Elenchi* (16)

*†*Abraham de Balmes (1523)

Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary on

*Rhetoric* (17)

(a) Excerpt in Hermann the

German’s translation of

Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*

(b) *†*Abraham de Balmes (1523)

Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary on

*Poetics* (18)

(a) Hermann the German (Toledo,

1256, AL 33)

(b) *†*Abraham de Balmes (1523)

(c) *†*Jacob Mantino (1550/2)

(*cont.*)

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(*cont.*)

Text Translator

Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary on

*Physics* (21)

(a) *†*Abraham de Balmes (MS Vat.

lat. 4548)

(b) *†*Jacob Mantino (1550/2), bks.

1–3

∗Ibn Rushd, Long Commentary on

*Physics* (22)

(a) Michael Scot (?) (1501)56

(b) Hermann the German (?) bk. 7

and bk. 8, comm. 80–6 only57

(c) Theodore of Antioch (1501;

Proemium)

(d) *†*Jacob Mantino (1550/2;

Proemium)

Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary on

*De Caelo* (24)

*†*Paolo Ricci (1511)

Ibn Rushd, Long Commentary on

*De Caelo* (25)

Michael Scot (?) (1501)58

Ibn Rushd, Epitome of *De*

*Generatione et Corruptione* (26)

(a) *†*Vitale Nisso (1550/2)

(b) *†*Abraham de Balmes (1552)

Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary on

*De Generatione et Corruptione*

(27)

Michael Scot (?) (1501)

Ibn Rushd, Epitome of *Meteora* (28) *†*Elias del Medigo (1488)

Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary on

*Meteora* (29)

(a)Michael Scot (?) (1501; bk. 4 only)

(b) *†*Elias del Medigo (1488;

fragment)

∗Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary

on nine books of *De Animalibus*

(30)

(a) Michael Scot (?)

(b) *†*Elias del Mendigo (MS Vat. lat.

4549; bks. 12-beginning of 14)

(c) *†*Jacob Mantino (1521)

Ibn Rushd, Epitome of *De Anima*

(31)

(a) *†*Elias del Medigo (MS Vat. lat.

4549; part of bk. 3)

(b) *†*Abraham de Balmes (1552)

∗Ibn Rushd, Long Commentary on

*De Anima* (33)

(a) Michael Scot (?)59

(b) *†*Jacob Mantino (1550/2; bk.3,

chs.5 and 36)

Ibn Rushd, Epitomes of *Parva*

*Naturalia* (34)

(a) Michael Scot (?)60

(b) *†*Abraham de Balmes (1552)

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(*cont.*)

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Ibn Rushd, Epitome of *Metaphysics*

(35)

*†*Jacob Mantino (1523)

∗Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary

on *Metaphysics*, I–VII (36)

*†*Elias del Medigo (1560)

Ibn Rushd, Long Commentary on

*Metaphysics* (37)

(a) Michael Scot (?) (1472)61

(b) *†*Elias del Medigo (1488; preface

to bk. Lambda)

(c) *†*Paolo Ricci (1511; preface to bk.

Lambda)

(d) *†*Jacob Mantino (1550/2; preface

to bk. Lambda)

∗Ibn Rushd, Middle Commentary

on *Nicomachean Ethics* (38)

Hermann the German (Toledo,

1240; 1501)

∗Ibn Rushd, Epitome of Plato’s

*Republic* (39)

(a) *†*Elias del Medigo62

(b) *†*Jacob Mantino (1550/2)

Ibn Rushd, Questions on Logic (40) (a) *†*Elias del Medigo (1497)

(b) *†*Abraham de Balmes (1523)

Ibn Rushd, Questions on Natural

Science (41)

*†*Abraham de Balmes (MS Vat.

Ottob. 2060)

Ibn Rushd, *Letter on the Primacy of*

*Predicates in Demonstrations*

*†*Abraham de Balmes (*Epistola de*

*Primitate Praedicatorum in*

*Demonstrationibus*; 1550/2)

Ibn Rushd, *On the Substance of the*

*Orb* (42)

(a) Michael Scot (?)

(b) *†*Abraham de Balmes (chs.6–7;

1550/2)

∗Ibn Rushd, *On the Separation of*

*the First Principle* (41)

*†*Afonso Dinis of Lisbon and

magister Alfonsus conversus

(Abner of Burgos), Valladolid,

mid-14th c.63

Ibn Rushd, *On the Possibility of*

*Conjunction with the Active*

*Intellect*, treatises 1 and 2 (43)

(a) *†*Afonso Dinis of Lisbon and

magister Alfonsus conversus

(Abner of Burgos)?: *De*

*Perfectione Naturali Intellectus*,

chs. 2–4 = tr. 1 and 2

(b) *†*Calo Calonymos ben David

(1550/2; tr. 1)

(*cont.*)

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(*cont.*)

Text Translator

Abu¯ Muh. ammad ‘Abdalla¯h Ibn

Rushd (the son of Ibn Rushd),

*On the Possibility of*

*Conjunction*

Anonymous (*De intellectu*; early

13th c.)64

Ibn Rushd, *al-Dam¯ıma* (55) Ram’on Mart’ı (*Epistola ad*

*amicum*)65

Ibn Rushd, *The Incoherence of*

*the Incoherence (Taha¯ fut*

*al-Taha¯ fut)*

(a) Calo Calonymos (1328)

(b) Calonymos ben David (1527)66

∗al-Bitruji (d. 1204, Alpetragius) *On*

*the Movements of the Heavens*

(a) Michael Scot and Abuteus Levita

(Toledo, 1217)

(b) *†*Calo Calonymos ben David

(1531)

Maimonides (1135 or 1138–1204),

*Guide to the Perplexed*67

(a) *†*John of Palermo (*Dux*

*Neutrorum*)

(b) *†*J. Buxtorf (*Dux Perplexorum*,

1629)

Maimonides, *Liber de uno Deo*

*Benedicto* (= *Guide*, bk. 2,

chs.1–2)

Anonymous (13th c.)

Maimonides, *Liber de Parabola*

(= *Guide*, bk. 3, chs. 29–30 and

32–49)

Anonymous (early 13th c.)

∗IbnT.

umlu¯ s, *Question †*Abraham de Balmes (1523)

∗Abu¯ al-Qa¯ sim ibn Idrı¯s, *Questions*

*concerning the Knowledge of*

*Genus and Species*

*†*Abraham de Balmes (1523;

*Quaesita de Notificatione*

*Generis et Speciei*)

∗Abu¯ al-Qa¯ sim

Muh. ammad/Mah.mu¯ d ibn

Qasim, *Question*

*†*Abraham de Balmes (1523)

∗Abu¯ ‘Abd al-Rah.ma¯n (?) ibn Jawhar

(Abuhabad Ahadrahman ben

Iohar), *Letters*68

*†*Abraham de Balmes (1523)

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Notes

1Details are given in G. Tamani, “Traduzioni ebraico-latine di opere

filosofiche et scientifiche,” *L’H´ebreu au temps de la renaissance*, ed. I.

Zinguer (Leiden: 1992), 105–14. I am very grateful to Dag Nikolaus Hasse

for providing further information from a chapter of his *Habilitationsschrift*:

“Arabic Sciences and Philosophy in the Renaissance.”

2 See Burnett [245], 276–81.

3 Parallel texts are included in G. Serra, “La traduzione araba del *De generatione*

*et corruptione* di Aristotele citata nel *Kita¯b al-Tas. rı¯f* attribuito a

J ¯abir,” *Medioevo* 23 (1997), 191–288.

4 In MS. Vat. Ott. Lat. 2048, see C. Martini, “The Arabic Version of the Book

*Alpha Meizon* of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and the Testimony of the MS. Bibl.

Apostolica Vaticana, Ott. Lat. 2048,” in J. Hamesse (ed.), *Les traducteurs au*

*travail: leurs manuscrits et leurs m´ethodes* (Turnhout: 2001), 173–206.

5 Ed. A. Pattin, in *Tijdschrift voor filosofie* 18 (1966), 90–203. New edition in

preparation by Richard Taylor; cf. R. C. Taylor, “Remarks on the Latin Text

and the Translator of the *Kal ¯ amf¯ımah.*

*d.*

*al-khair/Liber de Causis*,” *Bulletin*

*de philosophie m´edi ´evale* 31 (1989), 75–102. For Pseudo-Aristotelian works

in Arabic and Latin, see Kraye, Ryan, and Schmitt [60].

6 Ed. S. L. Vodraska, Ph.D. diss., London University, 1969.

7 H. Suchier, *Denkma¨ ler Provenzalischer Literatur und Sprache* (Halle:

1883), 473–80.

8 Ed. with Roger Bacon’s commentary by R. Steele, *Rogeri Baconi Opera*

*Hactenus Inedita*, vol. V (Oxford: 1920), 2–172.

9 Ed. M. Plezia (Warsaw: 1960).

10 C. Burnett, “‘Abd al-Mas¯ıh. ofWinchester,” in L. Nauta and A. Vanderjagt

(eds.), *Between Demonstration and Imagination: Essays on the History of*

*Science and Philosophy Presented to John D. North* (Leiden: 1999), 159–69.

11 Ed. G. Th’ery, “Autour du d’ecret de 1210: II. Alexandre d’Aphrodise,”

*Biblioth`eque thomiste* 7 (Kain: 1926), 74–82; see also C. Burnett, “Sons of

Averroes,” 282. The translations of Gundisalvi (Dominicus Gundissalinus)

fall between ca. 1160 and ca. 1190.

12 Ed. Th’ery, “Autour du d’ ecret,” 92–7, 86–91, and 99–100.

13 Ed. J. R. O’Donnell, *Medieval Studies* 20 (1958), 239–315.

14 Ed. S. Landauer (Berlin: 1902).

15 Ed.C. Burnett in “Physics before the *Physics*,” *Medioevo* 27 (2002), 53–109

(86–105).

16 Ed. F. Hudry in *Chrysopoeia* 6 (1997–9), 1–154.

17 Ed. J. Heller (Nuremberg: 1549).

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Notes (*cont.*)

18 Ed. J. Ruska, *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften*

*und der Medizin* 1 (Berlin: 1931).

19 Ed. J. Wilcox, “The Transmission and Influence of Qust.a¯ ibn Lu¯ qa¯ ’s *On*

*the Difference between Spirit and the Soul*,” Ph.D. diss., City University of

New York, 1985.

20 Ed. in J. Wilcox and J. M. Riddle, “Qust.a¯ ibn Lu¯ qa¯ ’s *Physical Ligatures*

and the Recognition of the Placebo Effect,” *Medieval Encounters* 1 (1995),

1–50.

21 Both translations ed. in R. Lemay, Abu¯ Ma‘shar al-Balkhı¯, *Liber Introductorii*

*Maioris ad Scientiam Judiciorum Astrorum*, 9 vols. (Naples, 1995–6;

see vols. V and VIII).

22 This and the following two items are ed. in A. Nagy, *Beitra¨ ge zur*

*Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, vol. II, pt. 5 (Mu‥ nster: 1897).

23 Ed. C. Burnett in G. Bos and C. Burnett, *Scientific Weather Forecasting*

*in the Middle Ages: The Writings of al-Kindi* (London: 2000), 263–310.

24 Ed. M.-T. d’Alverny and F. Hudry, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et*

*litte´ raire du moyen aˆ ge* 41 (1974), 139–259.

25 Ed. Gonz’alez Palencia, 2nd edn. (Madrid: 1953) (new edn. in preparation

by H. Hugonnard-Roche).

26 Ed. E. Gilson, “Les sources gr ’eco-arabes de l’augustinisme avicennisant,”

*Archives d’histoire doctrinale et litte´ raire du moyen aˆ ge* 4 (1929), 4–149

(115–26).

27 Ed. D. Salman, *Recherches de th´eologie ancienne et m´edievale* 12 (1940),

33–48.

28 This is a collection of comments on Aristotle’s logic. Al-F¯ar¯ab¯ı’s summaries

of at least the *Categories* and the *De Interpretatione*, as well as his

commentaries on the *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*, were known to Albertus

Magnus: see M. Grignaschi, “Les traductions latines des ouvrages de

la logique arabe et l’abr’eg’e d’Alfarabi,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et*

*litte´ raire du moyen aˆ ge* 39 (1972), 41–107.

29 See I. Bignami-Odier, “Le manuscrit Vatican latin 2186,” *Archives*

*d’histoire doctrinale et litte´ raire du moyen aˆ ge* 11 (1938), 133–66, at 137,

154–5.

30 Ed. M. Grignaschi, “Les traductions latines.”

31 Ed.M. Grignaschi and J. Langhade, *Deux ouvrages in´edits sur la r ´ethorique*

[sic] (Beirut: 1971).

32 Cf. a text ascribed to al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı inL. Thorndike and P. Kibre,*ACatalogue of*

*Incipits of Mediaeval ScientificWritings in Latin* (London: 1963), col. 1253:

“Liber de natura loci ex latitudine et longitudine: Quod naturam loci scire

oportet in scientia naturali . . .”

33 Incorporated into a Latin commentary on Euclid’s *Elements* in Vatican,

Reg. Lat. 1268, fols. 72r–73r, ed. C. Burnett, “Euclid and al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı in MS

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Vatican, Reg. Lat. 1268” in *Festschrift Gerhard Endress* (Leuven: 2004), 411–

36.

34The *De Perfectione* was rewrittenwith reference to the Hebrew by Alessandro

Achillini (1501); both texts are edited in M. Geoffroy and C. Steel,

*Averroe`s, La be´atitude de l’aˆme* (Paris: 2001).

35 The text is ascribed to “Mahometh discipulus Alquindi” (Muh. ammad,

a disciple of al-Kind¯ı), and entitled *Liber Introductorius in Artem Logicae*

*Demonstrationis*. Ed. Nagy, *Beitra¨ ge*, vol. II, pt. 5, 51–64. See further C. Baffioni,

“Il *Liber Introductorius in artem logicae demonstrationis*: problemi

storici e filologici,” *Studi filosofici* 17 (1994), 69–90.

36 Ed. P. Gauthier-Dalch’ e, *Revue d’histoire des textes* 18 (1988), 137–67.

37 Ed. A. Sannino, “Ermete mago e alchimista nelle biblioteche di Guglielmo

d’Alvernia e Ruggero Bacone,” *Studi Medievali* 41 (2000), 151–89; see C.

Baffioni, “Un esemplare arabo del Liber de quattuor confectionibus,” in P.

Lucentini et al. (ed.), *Hermetism from Late Antiquity to Humanism* (Turnhout:

2003), 295–313.

38 Printed in *Opera Omnia Isaac* (Lyons: 1515).

39 Both versions ed. J. T. Muckle, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et litt ´ eraire*

*du moyen aˆ ge* 11 (1938), 300–40.

40 Ed. A. Birkenmajer, “Avicennas Vorrede zum ‘Liber Sufficientiae’ und

Roger Bacon,” in A. Birkenmajer, *Etudes d’histoire des sciences et de la*

*philosophie dumoyen aˆ ge* (Wroclaw: 1970), 89–101. The information on *The*

*Cure* comes from M.-T. d’Alverny, “Notes sur les traductions m’edi ’evales

d’Avicenne,” article IV in d’Alverny [248]. The *Shifa¯ ’* is divided into *jumul*

(sing. *jumla*), which are progressively subdivided into *funu¯ n* (sing. *fann*),

*maq¯ al ¯ at* or “books,” and *fus.*

*u¯ l* (sing. *fas. l*) or “chapters.” The first two chapters

of the logic (j1, f1, bk. 1, chs. 1 and 2) are respectively entitled *Capitulum*

*Primum et Prohemiale ad Ostendendum quid Contineat Liber Asschyphe*

and *Capitulum de Excitando ad Scientias*.

41 Ed. L. Baur, *Beitra¨ ge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*,

vol. IV, pts. 2–3 (Mu‥ nster: 1903), 124–33 (see also 304–8).

42 Corresponding to bk. 3, chs. 1–10 in the Arabic. Arabic bk. 3, chs. 11–15

and bk. 4 do not appear to have been translated into Latin.

43 Ed. M. Renaud, *Bulletin de philosophie m´edi ´evale* 15 (1973), 92–130.

44 Ed. E. J. Holmyard and D. C. Mandeville (Paris: 1927).

45 Only as an item in the 1338 catalogue of the library of the Sorbonne.

46 Ed. Van Riet, *De Anima*, vol. II, AvL, 187–210.

47 This and the following translations by Alpago were made in Damascus in

ca. 1500; see M.-T. d’Alverny, “Andrea Alpago, interpr`ete et commentateur

d’Avicenne,” article XIV in d’Alverny [248].

(*cont*.)

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Notes (*cont.*)

48 Ed. E. Franceschini in *Atti del Reale istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed*

*arti* 91 (1931–2), 393–597 (the Latin is translated from the Spanish *Bocados*

*de oro*). For this sort of wisdom literature in Arabic see Gutas [22].

49 D. Salman, “Algazel et les latins,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et*

*litte´ raire du moyen aˆ ge* 10 (1936), 103–27 (125–7).

50 Part on logic ed. C. Lohr, *Traditio* 21 (1965), 223–90 (239–88); metaphysics

and physics ed. J. T. Muckle (Toronto: 1933).

51 Ed. C. Lohr, Diss. Freiburg/Br., 1967, 94–123 (this compendium was also

put into Catalan verse by Llull).

52 ALatin translation of a lost Castilian version made by “Abraham Hebreus”

for Alfonso X of Castile; ed. J. L. Mancha inM. Comes et al. (eds.), *“Ochava*

*espera” y “Astrof´ısica”* (Barcelona: 1990), 133–207 (141–97).

53 Ed. J.M.Mill ’as Vallicrosa, *Las traducciones orientales en losmanuscritos*

*de la Biblioteca catedral de Toledo* (Madrid: 1942), 285–312.

54 Ed. M. Smith, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 91.45

(2001).

55 Ed. R. Hissette (Leuven: 1996).

56 An *editio minor* is being prepared by G. Guldentops.

57 See H. Schmieja, “Secundum aliam Translationem: Ein Beitrag zur

arabisch-lateinischen U‥ bersetzung des grossen Physikkommentars von Ibn

Rushd,” in Aertsen and Endress [134], 316–36.

58 Ed. F. J. Carmody and R. Arnzen (Leuven: 2003).

59 Ed. F. S. Crawford (Cambridge, MA: 1953).

60 Ed. E. L. Shields (Cambridge, MA: 1949).

61 An *editio minor* is being prepared by D. N. Hasse.

62 Ed. A. Coviello and P. E. Fornaciari (Florence: 1992).

63 Ed. in C. Steel and G. Guldentops, “An Unknown Treatise of Averroes,”

*Recherches de th´eologie et philosophie m´edi ´evales* 64 (1997), 86–135 (94–

135).

64 Arabic, Hebrew and Latin versions ed. C. Burnett andM. Zonta, *Archives*

*d’histoire doctrinale et litte´ raire du moyen aˆ ge* 67 (2000), 295–335.

65 Ed.M. Alonso, *Teolog´ıa de Averroes: estudios documentos* (Madrid: 1947),

357–65.

66 Ed. B. H. Zedler (Milwaukee, WI: 1961).

67 For the medieval Latin translations of Maimonides, see W. Kluxen, “Literargeschichtliches

zum lateinischen Moses Maimonides,” *Recherches de*

*th´eologie ancienne et m´edi ´evale* 21 (1954), 23–50.

68 The last four items are included in *Epistolae seu Quesita Logica Diversorum*

*Doctorum Arabum precipue Averroys*. The original Arabic texts are

not known, and the last three authors have not been identified.

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19 Recent trends in Arabic and

Persian philosophy

In this chapter I will discuss Arabic and Persian philosophical trends

as presented in texts mainly from the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries and their more recent continuation. Philosophical activity

continued especially in the lands marked by the geopolitical boundaries

of Persianate influence, centered in the land of Iran as marked

since the Safavid period beginning in 1501.1 Of the philosophers in

the earlier, formative period of Arabic philosophy, it was Avicenna

whose works made the most direct and lasting impact on all subsequent

philosophical trends and schools. The structure, techniques,

and language of Avicenna’s philosophy – best exemplified in his two

main works, *al-Isha¯ ra¯ t wa al-tanbı¯ha¯ t* and *al-Shifa¯* ’ – define a holistic

system against which all subsequent philosophical writings, in

both Arabic and Persian, are measured. Avicenna’s philosophical

texts give Arabic and Persian Peripatetic philosophy its technical

language and methodology, as well as setting out a range of philosophical

problems in semantics, logic, ontology, epistemology, and

so on. Later trends must be regarded as refinements and developments

from within philosophical texts already established by the

twelfth century C.E.

Some Orientalist and apologetichistorians have chosen imprecise,

general descriptions such as “theosophy,” “Orientalwisdom,” “transcendent

theosophy,” “perennial wisdom,” “mystical experience,”

and the like, to describe an entire corpus of texts after Avicenna.2 I

will avoid such imprecise descriptions and focus on the philosophical

intention and value of the texts themselves, rather than the supposed

“spiritual,” “S.

u¯ fı¯,” or “esoteric” dimension of a wide and ill-defined

range of Arabic and Persian texts. As Fazlur Rahman has written, we

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interpret post-Avicennian texts in terms of an ill-defined mysticism

only “at the cost . . . of its purely intellectual and philosophical hard

core, which is of immense value and interest to the modern student

of philosophy.”3

The most significant philosophical trends after Avicenna attempt

to reconstruct consistent, holistic systems that *refine*, rather than

*refute*, a range of philosophical propositions and problems, thus rescuing

philosophy from the charges brought against it by al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı.

Increasing significance is also placed on constructing philosophical

systems more compatible with religion. The philosophical system

with the deepest impact on later trends, second only to that of

Avicenna, is the “philosophy of Illumination” of Suhraward¯ı.4 The

system defines a new method, the “Science of Lights” (*‘ilm alanwa*

*¯ r*), which holds that we obtain the principles of science immediately,

via “knowledge by presence” (*al-‘ilm al-h. ud. u¯ rı¯*). About half

a century after the execution of Suhraward¯ı in Aleppo in 1191, the

philosophy of Illumination was heralded as a “more complete system”

(*al-niz.*

*a¯mal-atamm*) by Illuminationist commentators starting

with Shams al-Dı¯n al-Shahrazu¯ rı¯.5 The aimto build such “complete”

or holistic systems is distinctive of later philosophical trends, especially

in the seventeenth century. Such systems aim to expand the

structure of Aristotelian philosophy to include carefully selected

religious topics, defending the harmony between philosophy and

religion.

In what follows Iwill therefore examine, first, the relation of these

holistic systems to the older Peripatetic and newer Illuminationist

traditions; second, the question of a “harmonization” between philosophy

and religion, focusing on the work of the Persian philosopher

Ibn Torkeh Is.fah¯an¯ı; and finally, specific philosophical problems of

interest in the later tradition. It should be emphasized that though

many thinkers in the later tradition, from Suhraward¯ı onward, do

discuss “mystical” phenomena, and especially the epistemology of

experiential and inspirational knowledge, they do so from the perspective

of philosophy. The representative figures of later trends are

rationalist thinkers and scientists (*‘u¯ lama’*); none were members of

S.

u¯ fı¯ brotherhoods, and almost all – especially from the seventeenth

century on – belonged to the *‘ulama¯ ’*, that is, the Shı¯‘ite clerical

classes.6

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systematic philosophy

Intense philosophical activity took place from the mid-sixteenth

century, first in Sh¯ır ¯az and subsequently in Isfah¯an, lasting for about

a century and a half. This has been described as a “revival of philosophy,”

which led to what has been called “the school of Is.fah¯an.”

The most important figure of this period is S. adr al-D¯ın Sh¯ır ¯az¯ı,

Mull¯a S. adr¯ a, who was the student of the school’s “founder,” M¯ır

D¯am¯ad, and whose greatest philosophical achievement is his *magnum*

*opus*, *al-H. ikma al-muta‘a¯ liya fı¯ al-asfa¯ r al-arba‘a al-‘aqliyya*

(usually referred to simply as *Asfa¯ r*). His system and “school” are

also called *al-h. ikma al-muta‘a¯ liya*, or metaphysical philosophy.7

Mull¯a S. adr¯a’s many philosophical works, as well as his commentaries

and independent works on juridical and other religious subjects,

fall within the school’s rational and “scientific” (‘*ilm¯ı*) intention.

Ensuing scholastic activity of the Sh¯ı‘ite centers based on this

system continues today. A significant development, which probably

owes more to philosophers such asS.

adr¯a than some would admit, is

the theoretical Shı¯‘ite syllabus of the intellectual sciences (‘*ulu¯m-e*

*‘aqlı¯*), the higher levels of which include the study of the *Asfa¯ r*

preceded by the study of philosophical textbooks, notably Ath¯ır

al-Dı¯n al-Abharı¯’s*Hida¯ya al-h. ikma* (*Guide to Philosophy*), onwhich

numerous commentaries, glosses, and super-glosses have been written

including one by S.

adr¯a himself. In short, the system *al-h. ikma*

*al-muta‘a¯ liya* and its repercussions still define intellectual Shı¯‘ism

at present.

Unlike Avicenna’s *al-Shifa¯ ’*, the *Asfa¯ r* has no separate section

on logic or physics; it thus departs from the Peripatetic division of

philosophy into logic, physics, and metaphysics, seen not only in

Avicenna but also in such textbooks as the aforementioned *Hida¯ya*

*al-h. ikma*. Instead the emphasis is on the study of being, the subject of

the first of the *Asfa¯ r*’s four books. The work also differs structurally

from Suhraward¯ı’s *Philosophy of Illumination*, andS.

adr¯a rejects Illuminationist

views regarding many philosophical problems. Still he

follows Illuminationist methodology, despite refining Suhraward¯ı’s

positions in light of S.

adr¯a’s understanding of Peripatetic philosophy.

His overall Illuminationist outlook is evident in several

domains.

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(a) the principles of science and epistemology. In the *Asfa¯ r*

“primary intuition” takes the place of Aristotelian definition (*horos*,

*horismos*, Avicenna’s *al-h. add al-ta¯mm*) as the foundation of science

and syllogistic reasoning. This non-Peripatetic position, which is

claimed to be Stoic in its original formulation, posits a primary intuition

of time-space, and holds that “visions” and “personal revelations”

(including religious revelation) are epistemically valid.S.

adr¯a

here follows the Illuminationists in holding that knowledge by presence

(*al-‘ilm al-h. ud. u¯ rı¯*) is prior to predicative knowledge (*al-‘ilm*

*al-h. us.*

*u¯ lı¯*). He also dispenses, as Suhrawardı¯ had, with the central

role of the Active Intellect as the tenth intellect of a numbered, discrete

(that is, discontinuous) cosmology, in obtaining first principles.

He praises the Illuminationist notion of a multiplicity of intellects

(*kathra ‘uqu¯ l*), which are distinguished only by equivocation

in terms of degrees of “more” and “less,” as an “improvement”

on the Peripatetic model. This gives rise to S.

adr¯a’s theory of the

“unity” or “sameness” of the knower and the known, perhaps the

most discussed theory in all recent philosophical writings in Arabic

and Persian. The influence ofS.

adr¯a’s epistemology continues today,

as in the work of the eminent Sh¯ı‘ite philosopher, Seyyed Jal ¯ al al-D¯ın

A¯ shtiya¯nı¯.8

(b) ontology. The “primacy of quiddity” (*as.a¯ la al-ma¯hiyya*) is a

central tenet of Illuminationism, but is rejected by S.

adr¯a in favor

of the “primacy of being” (*as.a¯ la al-wuju¯ d*). Illuminationists also

divided metaphysics into two parts: *metaphysica generalis* and

*metaphysica specialis*, that is, the study of pure being as opposed

to the study of qualified being. This division, upheld and refined

by S.

adr¯ a, is incorporated into every philosophical work in the later

tradition, up to the present.

(c) science and religion. Aristotle’s views on the foundation of

philosophy are refined and expanded byS.

adr¯a. His theory of knowledge

is more along the lines of Illuminationist principles, according

to which knowledge is not founded primarily on the input of

sensation and abstraction of universals, but rather on the knowing

subject (*al-mawd. u¯ ‘ al-mudrik*) itself. This subject knows its

“I” – *al-’ana’iyya al-muta‘a¯ liya –* by means of the principle of

self-consciousness. The “I” intuitively recovers primary notions of

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time-space, accepts the validity of such things as the primary intelligibles,

and confirms the existence of primary truths and of God.

The system is thus seen later as providing a philosophical foundation

more congenial to religious doctrine. This paves the way for the

triumph of *al-h. ikma al-muta‘a¯ liya* in the scholastic Shı¯‘ite centers

of Iran. If we ponder the impact ofS.

adr¯a’s system on Sh¯ı‘ite political

doctrine, we may fathom how intellectual Sh¯ı‘ism, as the dominant

recent trend in philosophy, has embraced the primacy of practical

reason over theoretical science, especially in the last century. Theoretical

philosophy is subject to the Illuminationist critique that it

is impossible to reach universal propositions that are always true –

the Peripatetic “laws of science.” Instead “living” sages in every era

are thought to determine what “scientific” attitude the society must

have, upholding and renewing the foundations using their own individual,

experiential, subjective knowledge.

Let me explain further. An Avicennian universal proposition must

be both necessary and always true. But, because of the unavoidable

contingency or possibility of the future (*al-imka¯n al-mustaqbal*),

the validity of a “law” deduced now may be overturned at some

future time by the discovery of exceptions. Furthermore, the most

foundational, necessary knowledge that is true at all times must, it

is argued, satisfy the Platonic dictum that all knowledge is based

on further knowledge. It cannot then be predicative, that is, have

the form “S is P” – otherwise we would have an infinite regress.

Rather, it is through knowledge by presence at a *given* time that

the knowing subject “sees” (*yusha¯hid*, a technical term meaning

both external sight and intellectual grasp of “internal” realities) the

object, and obtains knowledge of this object in a durationless instant.

There is thus an atemporal relation of knowledge between the subject

and object, which occurs when the subject is “sound” (i.e., has

a heightened intuition and visionary experience, or a functioning

organ of sight in the case of external vision), when there exists an

appropriate “medium,” which may be “intellect,” “sense,” “inspiration,”

“dream,” etc.; and when there are no barriers between subject

and object. This primary, intuitive, and immediate knowledge

serves as the foundation for the syllogistic construction of scientific

laws. But the foundations will have to be renewed by other

subjects in all future time, or in all other possible worlds, based

on the “observations” of those subjects. In recent Sh¯ı‘ite political

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philosophy this is the role given to the most learned Sh¯ı‘ite scholastic

of the time.9

(d) history of philosophy. This is an area first touched upon

by the classical historians and biographers of scientists (including

physicians, philosophers, and other specialists) such as Ibn Ab¯ı

Us.aybi‘a, al-Qift.ı¯, Abu¯ Ya‘qu¯ b al-Sijista¯nı¯, Ibn Juljul al-Andalu¯ sı¯,

and others. S.

adr¯a goes further in giving a systematic analysis

of the history of philosophical ideas and schools. He divides

those philosophers he deems significant into four groups: first,

the Pythagoreans, Plato, and the Platonists, who agree to some

extent with the Illuminationists; second, the “earlier” Peripatetics;

third, the “later” Peripatetics – distinguished at times from a

“pure” Aristotelian position, where Proclus and Porphyry are usually

included; and fourth, the Illuminationists, whom he calls “followers

of the Stoics.” The division between “earlier” and “later”

(*al-mutaqaddimu¯ n*, *al-muta’akhkhiru¯ n*) Peripatetics is also found

in previous authors like al-Baghda¯dı¯, Suhrawardı¯, al-Shahrazu¯ rı¯, and

Qut.b al-D¯ın al-Sh¯ır ¯az¯ı.

One discussion of this history is to be found in *Asfa¯ r* III.iii.4. Here

S.

adr¯a takes up, among other issues, the question of God’s knowledge

and the epistemology of knowledge by presence as a description of

God’s knowledge. He distinguishes seven schools of thought, the

four philosophical ones just mentioned, as well as two “theological”

schools and a “mystical” school.10 This classification of the history

of philosophy reflects Shahrazu¯ rı¯’s *al-Shajara al-Ila¯hiyya*, composed

three centuries before the *Asfa¯ r*.11 Among the “school of

the followers of the Peripatetics” (*madhhab tawa¯bi‘ al-mashsha¯ ’ı¯n*)

S.

adr¯a includes al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı and Avicenna, their followers, such as

Bahmany¯ar (Avicenna’s famous student and author of *al-Tah.*

*s.*

*¯ıl*),

Abu¯ al-Abba¯ s al-Lawkarı¯, and “many later Peripatetics” (*kathı¯r min*

*al-muta’akhkhir¯ın*).12 The “later Peripatetics” include only Muslim

philosophers. Al-Kind¯ı is not mentioned, and in fact his name appears

rarely in the *Asfa¯ r* in general. (Notice also the exclusion of Fakhr

al-D¯ın al-R¯az¯ı, who is considered a *mutakallim*by the Illuminationist

philosophers, notably by Shahrazu¯ rı¯ in his history of philosophy,

*Nuzha al-arw¯ ah.*

, and in his philosophical encyclopedia, *al-Shajara*

*al-Il ¯ ahiyya*.13 S.

adra¯ , too, dismisses al-Ra¯zı¯’s *kala¯m* methodology.)14

This group is said to uphold “primacy of being” (*as.a¯ la al-wuju¯ d*)

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and the eternity of the world (*qidam*), while rejecting bodily resurrection.

They posit that the soul is separated from the body but their

position on the question of the immortality of the individual soul

is unclear. Of their viewsS.

adr¯a accepts only the ontological view of

the “later Peripatetics.”

Next is “the school of the Master Shih¯ab al-D¯ın [Suhraward¯ı]

al-Maqtu¯ l, follower of the Stoics, and those who follow him, such

as al-Muh. aqqiq al-T. u¯ sı¯, Ibn Kammu¯ na, al-‘Alla¯ma [Qut.b al-Dı¯n]

al-Shı¯ra¯zı¯, and Muh. ammad al-Shahrazu¯ rı¯, author of *al-Shajara al-*

*Ila¯hiyya*.”15 The attribution of “Stoic” to the Illuminationist school

appears in many places in the *Asfa¯ r*. But concerning certain “novel”

philosophical issues, such as the distinction between the idea of

“intellectual form” (*al-s.*

*u¯ ra al-‘aqliyya*) and the idea of “archetypal

form” (*al-s.*

*¯ ura al-mith¯ aliyya*),S.

adr¯a is careful to use the term “Illuminationist”

(*al-ishra¯qiyyu¯ n*). The Stoic epithet is added only in

conjunction with questions that relate to logic and physics, while

in matters that pertain to epistemology, cosmology, and eschatology,

“Illuminationist” is used alone.16 Among the central doctrines

of this “school” is said to be that of the real existence of the forms of

things outside the mind (*al-qawl bi-kawn wuj ¯ uds.*

*uwar al-ashya¯ ’ fı¯*

*al-kha¯ rij*), be the things corporeal or not (*mujarrada¯ t awma¯ddiyya¯ t*),

or simple or not (*murrakaba¯ t aw basa¯ ’it*). This “naive realism” is

indeed a cornerstone of the recent trends and does continue certain

Illuminationist views.17

Next is “the school attributed (*al-mansu¯ b*) to Porphyry, the first

of the Peripatetics (*muqaddam al-mashsha¯ ’ı¯n*), one of the greatest

followers of the first teacher,” in other words the earlier Peripatetics.

The reference to Aristotle (“the first teacher”) alludes to the

*Theology of Aristotle*, that is, the Arabic Plotinus. Among the views

associatedwith this “school” is their view that the intelligible forms

(*al-s.*

*uwar al-ma‘q ¯ ula*) share “unity” (*ittih.*

*a¯d*) with God, and through

the Active Intellect with a “select” number of humans. Aristotle

himself is not always associated with a “school,” but is deemed

an exemplum against whom every philosophical position is to be

judged.

Finally there is “the school of the divine Plato.” It is possible that

S.

adr¯a here means Plato himself rather than a continuing “school

of thought.” If so then S.

adr¯a is distinguishing the philosophical

position of Plato himself as distinct from later syncretic, so-called

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“Platonic” texts. S.

adr¯a clearly attempts to refer to Plato himself

by using the phrase “*q¯ ala Afl ¯ at.*

*u¯ n al-sharı¯f* (the noble Plato said)”

rather than, as elsewhere, “*f¯ımadhhab al-afl ¯ at.*

*u¯ niyya* (in the school

of the Platonists).”18 The central philosophical doctrine here is said

to be the “objectified” reality of the Separate Forms (*al-s.*

*uwar almufa*

*¯ raqa*) and the intelligible Platonic Forms (*al-muthul al-‘aqliyya*

*al-afl ¯ at.*

*uniyya*), a position upheld strongly byS.

adr¯a. On this basis, he

adds, God’s knowledge of all existents (*‘ilm Alla¯h bi-al-mawju¯ da¯ t*

*kulluha¯* ) is proven. Thus al-Ghaza¯ lı¯’s anti-rationalist polemic that

the philosophers do not uphold God’s knowledge, and that deductive

reasoning cannot prove it, is rejected. The ensuing scholastic

Sh¯ı‘ite intellectual tradition regards this as a triumph ofS.

adr¯a’s.

Of interest for us in this chapter is that what properly characterizes

recent philosophical trends is the above-mentioned “second school,”

namely the Illuminationists. Recent and contemporary trends are

dominated by this school, taken together with the new emphasis

placed on religious philosophy byS.

adr¯a. For example, in relation to

the issue of immortality and resurrection,S.

adr¯a seemingly attempts

to “prove” the resurrection of a kind of *imaginalis* or “formal”

body (*badan mitha¯ lı¯*, a notion later found in the nineteenth-century

philosopher Sabziwar¯ı). In doing so he departs from the Illuminationist

doctrine of the immortality of a separate, disembodied soul. In

many areas of detailed philosophical argumentsS.adr¯a states both the

Avicennian and the Illuminationist views and adjudicates between

them, sometimes providing a third, more refined position. This new

expression of philosophy would be accepted by the leading Sh¯ı‘ite

thinkers, and gradually even by the majority of Sh¯ı‘ite clergy at

present. This is how S.

adr¯a’s legacy lives, not perhaps as unbound,

analytic philosophy but as an accepted religious system of thinking,

with the claim that it promotes reason as the main tool of

upholding the tenets of revealed religion, as well as the specifically

Sh¯ı‘ite doctrine of inspirational authority in the domain of political

theory.

In sum, the main philosophical position of the new holistic system,

metaphysical philosophy, which defines the dominant recent

trends of philosophy in the Iranian Sh¯ı‘ite domain, may be outlined

as follows. First, philosophical construction is founded on a primary

intuition of time-space, and visions and personal revelations are valid

epistemological processes. Knowledge by presence is considered to

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be prior to predicative knowledge, and the separate intellects are considered

to be multiple, even uncountable (*bi-la¯ niha¯ya*), and to form

a continuum. This is in stark contrast to the Peripatetic model of

discrete, numbered, separate intellects. The ontological position of

the later school is not very clear, but in my view it is more along

the lines of “primacy of being” (*as.a¯ la al-wuju¯ d*), though it is set out

in the terms of the Illuminationist view of being as continuum. In

any case, this position is central to the tradition; it is discussed in

great detail in S. adr ¯a’s *Ta‘l¯ıq¯ at* (*Glosses*) on *H.*

*ikma al-ishra¯q*.19 The

Platonic Forms are objectified, and the *mundus imaginalis* of Illuminationist

cosmology is considered to be a separate realm whose

existence is attested by the intuitive mode of “experience.” Finally,

metaphysics is divided into two parts: *metaphysica generalis* and

*metaphysica specialis*. This marks an Illuminationist departure from

Avicennian pure ontology, the study of being qua being (*wuju¯ d bima*

*¯ huwa wuju¯ d*). It includes discussion of such subjects as mystical

states and stations, love, secrets of dreams, prophecy, sorcery, and

the arts of magic.

s.

a￣ ’in al-dı￣n and the harmony of religion

and philosophy

The use of epistemology to ground Islamic religious belief goes back

at least as far as al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı’s *Book of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of*

*The Virtuous City*, inwhich the ideal ruler is the legitimate lawgiver

because of his connection with the divine; this is based on the theory

of union with the Active Intellect. The attempt to construct an

Islamic religious philosophy continues beyond the formative period

of the tenth century, and later thinkers express religious philosophy

in terms more “Islamic” than Hellenic. The unbound reason of

Greek philosophy, which would grant primacy to reason over revelation,

was attacked by al-Ghaz¯ al¯ı and then by a host of lesser figures,

leading to the hard blow dealt by Ibn Taymiyya in his *Refutation of*

*the Rationalists* (*al-Radd ‘ala¯ al-mant. iqiyyı¯n*).20 An influential figure

who did much to recover the idea of the harmony between religion

and philosophy, as well as mysticism (*‘irfa¯n*), was Ibn Torkeh

‘Al¯ı b. Moh.ammad Khojand¯ı Is. fah¯an¯ı (d. ca. 1432), known often by

his title, S.

¯a’in al-D¯ın, in Sh¯ı‘ite scholarly circles.21 Since S.

¯a’in al-

D¯ın was identified with the emerging clerical classes, his use of

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philosophy to uphold religion was deemed acceptable, which paved

the way for later, more creative thinkers like S. adr¯a. Thanks to figures

like S. ¯a’in al-D¯ın, the Sh¯ı‘ite clergy came to accept the notion of the

“intellectual sciences” (*al-‘ulu¯m al-‘aqliyya*), which use philosophy

as philosophy, without reducing it to the role of a “handmaiden,”

and which treat Greek philosophers with reverence instead of the

hostility evinced by anti-rationalists like Ibn Taymiyya.S.

¯a’in al-D¯ın

was an example of those educated, scholastic thinkers who also held

position at courts of temporal rule (in his case theGu¯ rka¯nid Ilkhans).

The manifestly political philosophical core of this trend was allied

to a real political agenda.

S.

¯a’in al-D¯ın’s works are now accepted to have been among the

first to harmonize philosophical method, religious doctrine, and

“mystical” (*‘irf ¯ an-e naz.*

*ar¯ı*) knowledge. In recent studies that discuss

philosophical trends in intellectual Sh¯ı‘ism, S.

¯a’in al-D¯ın is hailed

as one of the scholars in Iran who began to construct systematic

rationalist religious philosophy with a distinct “Sh¯ı‘ite” emphasis

on *‘ilm* (knowledge). He affirmed divinely inspired, but rationally

upheld, principles of religion that would insure the continuance

of just rule. The idea that each age has its own personification of

knowledge (*a‘lam*), and especially the popularization of this idea,

are in part a result of S.

¯a’in al-D¯ın’s work. As Sadughi has shown,

significant twentieth-century Sh¯ı‘ite scholars of the “intellectual

sciences” (*‘ulu¯m-e ‘aqlı¯* is incidentally a term perhaps first popularized

by S.

¯a’in al-D¯ın) such as Ziy¯a’ al-D¯ın Dorr¯ı (d. 1336 A.H.),

A¯ qa¯ Mı¯rza¯ Moh. ammad Qomshe’ı¯ (d. 1306 A.H.) and his mentor

Mı¯rza¯ Moh. ammad ‘Alı¯ Moz.affar, A¯ qa¯ Mı¯rza¯ Mah.mu¯ d al-Modarres

al-Kahakı¯ al-Qommı¯ (d. 1346 A.H.), and A¯ qa¯ Seyyed Moh. ammad

K¯az.em al-Lav¯as¯ani al-Tehr¯an¯ı (d. 1302 A.H.) all studied S.

¯a’in al-

Dı¯n’s most significant text, *Tamh. ı¯d al-qawa¯ ‘id*.22 This work is best

described in contemporary technical language as a text on phenemenology

and philosophy of religion, in which the fundamental

political doctrine of the legitimacy of divinely inspired rule by select

members of the *‘ulama¯ ’* class is upheld.

Of interest for the understanding of how philosophical theory

influences Sh¯ı‘ite political thinking is the little-noticed fact that

S.

¯a’in al-D¯ın is among the first to draw on the Illuminationist epistemology

of knowledge by presence and use it to give priority to

intuitive and inspired knowledge, especially in the case of primary

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principles. The development of Sh¯ı‘ite religious philosophy does,

of course, incorporate ideas from traditions other than *falsafa*. For

example, it employs non-polemical, “scientific” *kala¯m* to attack

anti-rationalist, Ash‘arite political and theological dogma. Equally,

Qur’ ¯anic exegesis is used to support rationalist jurisprudence. Here

S.

¯a’in al-D¯ın presented easily accessible rational analyses of the

five Pillars of Islam and similar subjects. As A¯ shtiya¯nı¯ shows,

S.

a¯ ’in al-Dı¯n’s “political” intention, as a scholar serving Gu¯ rka¯nid,

universalist Islamic ambitions, was to compose most of his texts in

a language and style comprehensible by the multitude.23 All of this

led to wider acceptance of the doctrine that the *‘ulama¯ ’* should be

entrusted with upholding just rule. S.

¯a’in al-D¯ın’s innovative ideas,

still extant in more than sixty works, played a central role in shaping

the intellectual tradition of Iranian Sh¯ı‘ism, especially the popularization

of the core of the new Sh¯ı‘ite political philosophy: the idea of

rationally proven, divinely inspired knowledge in the service of just

rule. Increasingly the “citizens” are not given an active role, but are

led to believe in the doctrine of obedience and “imitation” (*taql¯ıd*) in

all matters, including the political. This paves the way for the central

institution of the religious leader as the “source of imitation”

(*marja‘-e taql¯ıd*).

philosophical problems in recent arabic

and persian texts

The history of the philosophical tradition beginning a century or so

prior to the School of Is.fah¯an, and continuing down to the present,

has yet to be written. The few texts published in critical editions

do provide us with a basis from which we can select certain problems

and themes of philosophical interest, but we have to proceed

cautiously. There are very few philosophical treatises in Arabic or

Persian prior to the sixteenth century devoted to a specific, singular

topic – what we would today call a “monograph.” There are exceptions,

notably *al-S¯ıra al-falsafiyya* (*The Philosophical Way of Life*)

by the brilliant ninth-century Persian scientist Abu¯ Bakr al-Ra¯zı¯,

and a few others that fall within the general domain of political philosophy.

But philosophical compositions are predominantly inclusive,

and treat comprehensive sets of problems. This is true of all

of Avicenna’s major works, and of non-Peripatetic works as well.

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For example, in the technical works of Suhraward¯ı and others, even

when the main structure of philosophical texts is changed, the philosophical

problems are still discussed in a comprehensive way.24 This

tendency toward comprehensive works seems to continue up to the

fifteenth or even the sixteenth century; even authors who wanted to

deal with specific problems were constrained to make their innovative

contributions within the context of commentaries, glosses, and

super-glosses on existing comprehensive texts.

I cannot say exactly when the practice of composing separate

philosophical treatises finally became widespread. This is because of

the paucity of published philosophical texts, especially those from

themid-fourteenth century (the end of the scientific revival in northwest

Iran, promoted by the Mongols and the first of the Ilkh¯ans, and

directed by the Persian philosopher and scientist, Kh¯ajeh Nas. ¯ır al-

Dı¯n al-T. u¯ sı¯) to the sixteenth century. But I have examined the few

anthologies of Arabic and Persian texts, as well as the few critical

editions of texts by authors from the sixteenth to the nineteenth

centuries.25 This allows me to indicate a fair number of monographs

on specific subjects. Many of these treatises deal with specific

ontological problems; notably, something like literary genres

spring up devoted to the topics of the “proof of the Necessary”

(*ithb¯ at al-w¯ ajib*), the “unity of being” (*wah.*

*da al-wuju¯ d*), the “relation

between quiddity and being” (*ittis.a¯ f al-ma¯hiyya bi-al-wuju¯ d*),

and other related ontological topics. Others deal with problems of

cosmology and creation, and especially the “temporal creation” or

“becoming of the world” (*h.*

*udu¯ th al-‘a¯ lam)*, and also “eternal creation”

(*h.*

*udu¯ th dahrı¯*). Still others deal with epistemological problems.

Foremost among these are treatises on Mull¯a S. adr¯a’s famous

“unity of knower and the known” (*ittih.*

*a¯d al-‘a¯qil wa al-ma‘qu¯ l*)

and related issues. Finally, a fairly large number of treatises reply to

questions or objections, or take the formof dialogues or disputations

between scholastic figures.

It is noteworthy that there are very few, if any, monographs (among

those known to me) on topics in formal and material logic. The only

such monographs are usually in the formof dialogue and disputation

and dealwith the philosophy of language. Prominent are the problem

of the “liar paradox” and other logical paradoxes with ontological

implications.26 Those few works on logic of the seventeenth century

in particular that have been published are simplified textbooks, in

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the style and manner of standard Peripatetic textbooks, which follow

the structure of Aristotle’s *Organon*, usually excluding the *Poetics*.

This is perhaps best exemplified in S. adr¯a’s own textbook on logic,

*On the Refinement of Logic* (*al-Tanq¯ıh. f¯ı al-mant. iq*).27 Still, we can

isolate a few problems of interest in logical works of this period.

(a) logical paradoxes and philosophy of language. The wellknown

liar paradox of antiquity, that the statement “I am lying” can

be neither true nor false, becomes the subject of a heated debate in the

sixteenth century in the southern Iranian city of Sh¯ır ¯az.28 This debate

may have continued in the later tradition, alongwith others on topics

in theoretical logic (not counting semantics and semiotics),29 but we

have little evidence for it. Indeed this may be an indication of the

recent lack of interest in theoretical philosophy as an independent

intellectual pursuit. The debate on the liar paradox was between two

of sixteenth-century Iran’s leading scholastic philosophers, S.

adr al-

D¯ın Dashtak¯ı and Jal ¯ al al-D¯ın Daww¯an¯ı. The name of the paradox

is *shubha kull kala¯mı¯ ka¯dhib*, which combines the term *shubha*,

literally meaning “doubt” or “ambiguity,” with the short form of

the proposition *kull kala¯mı¯ ka¯dhib*, which literally means “all of

my statements are false.” In expanded expressions of the proposition,

and by way of analysis, temporal modifiers are added, such as “now,”

“tomorrow,” “forever,” etc.30

The story of the unfolding debate is both historically and philosophically

interesting. Later scholars join the debate and themselves

write monographs trying to “resolve” the paradox, by upholding one

of the two positions, that of Daww¯an¯ı or that of Dashtak¯ı. Dashtak¯ı

first sparks the controvery in his “glosses” (*h.*

*awa¯ shı¯*) to a commentary

on an earlier scholastic work by Qu¯ shjı¯, which mentioned the

paradox.31 Daww¯an¯ı then writes at least two “responses” to the position

expressed by Dashtak¯ı, later composing a fairly lengthy monograph

on it himself.32 This shows serious involvement in a theoretical

issue, going well beyond what is usually assumed to have been a

lifeless scholastic tradition of glosses and super-glosses on standard

texts. Here we have important representatives of the sixteenth- and

early seventeenth-century intellectual endeavor in Iran devoting a

great deal of time to analysis and discussion of a long-standing logical

paradox. This is an indication of the continuity of innovative

thinking, and serves as an important historical lesson regarding later

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philosophical trends in general. Philosophically, while it is not possible

to go into the details of the debate here, it is worth summarizing

Dashtak¯ı’s analysis. Not unlike today’s logicians, he distinguishes

between the first- and second-order truth and falsity of the proposition,

and thus insists on the need to distinguish ordinary or natural

language on the one hand, and meta-language on the other. This original

insight was both deep and novel for its time: an example of how

such monographs could be an instrument for genuinely analytical

approaches to solving philosophical problems.

(b) ontology. Monographs on ontological topics and problems

dominate the philosophical discourse in recent Arabic and Persian

philosophy. The subject also occupies the major portion in almost

all books on philosophy in general. Recent philosophical discourse

has refined the earlier distinction between general and special metaphysics,

and focused on the study of being as being, but has also taken

a phenomenological approach to the topic. However, Avicennian

ideas (the essence–existence distinction, the modalities of being, and

the proof of the “Necessary Being”) continue to define this discipline.

Suhraward¯ı’s ideas that being is a continuum and is equivocal also

exert influence. As we have seen, both live on in the systematic presentation

ofS.

adr¯a. The disagreement between the primacy of being

and primacy of essence is still debated and often used to distinguish

differing camps of philosophy. Related areas of study include the

question of whether the number of categories can be reduced (*h.*

*as. r*

*al-maqu¯ la¯ t*), as first proposed by Suhrawardı¯, perhaps under Stoic

influence. This involves removing the study of categories from the

logical corpus of the *Organon*, and situating it instead in the study of

principles of physics. Thus, for example, the category of substance is

reduced to the category of motion: a dynamic conception referred to

as “substantial motion” (*h.araka jawhariyya*), a central idea of Mull¯a

S.

adr¯a’s.33

(c) theories of causality. I will conclude by examining Mulla

S.

adr¯a’s discussion of an important problem of causality. My choice

of both problem and philosopher serves, I hope, to demonstrate in a

final way the basic objectives of this chapter. The text in question

is *Ta‘l¯ıq¯ at ‘al ¯ a Sharh. h.*

*ikma al-ishra¯q* (*Glosses on the Commentary*

*on the Philosophy of Illumination*), a highly refined philosophical

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discourse in a precise technical language, which shows the amazing

breadth ofS.

adr¯a’s knowledge of philosophy up to his time, extending

from the Greek masters to the great Persian figures, as well as a

high level of penetrating analysis, well beyond that of the scholastic

tradition of commentaries, glosses and textbooks. It is a set of glosses

on a commentary by the thirteenth-century philosopher Qut.b al-D¯ın

Sh¯ır ¯az¯ı, which is in turn a commentary on a work of Suhraward¯ı’s.34

But the scholastic nature of this exercise belies the innovation of the

ideasS.

adr¯a presents here; ideas that he would not have presented in

a more “public” discourse.

S.

adr¯a presents his theory of causality by first examining the types

of priority.35 He is responding to Suhraward¯ı’s statement that “the

priority of cause over effect is a mental one, and not a temporal one.”

S.

adr¯a explains that “priority” is when two things exist such that one

may exist without necessitating the other, but the other is necessitated

only when the first is necessitated. S.

adr¯a now announces

that, in addition to the “five famous types” of priority,36 there are

other types he will discuss. For the first significant additional type

of priority,S.

adr¯a has coined the phrase “priority in terms of Truth”

(*taqaddum bi-al-h. aqq*). This is the priority of the ranks of being generated

from “the First” down to the lowest level of existence. In a

way this is the same type of priority Suhraward¯ı called “priority in

terms of nobility” (*taqaddum bi-al-sharaf*), yet S.adr¯a wants to distinguish

his “priority in terms of Truth” from all other types. His

intention is to provide an exposition of his own view of emanation,

and the view of his teacher M¯ır D¯am¯ad that creation is “eternal

generation” (*hudu¯ th dahrı¯*). This allows him to harmonize a philosophical

understanding of “causality”with religious commitment to

“creation.”

He does this by arguing that mere ranking of nobility does not

imply the inclusion of what is lower “in” the higher, as the ranks

of being are in God. Nor is priority in terms of causality adequate,

according to the standard view of such priority. Priority of position,

place, rank, or time also fails to capture the priority of the rank of

created beings. He finally states that this type of priority by Truth

(*taqaddum bi-al-h. aqq*) is something “apparent” (*z.*

*a¯hir*), known by

those who are resolute in the experiential cognitive mode. What,

then, is *taqaddum bi-al-h. aqq*? If it cannot be captured by any notion

of causality, whether essential, natural, or mathematical, then it

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can be known only by the subject’s own understanding of “truth,”

*h.*

*aqq*. It is grounded, then, in immediate and subjective knowledge

by presence. HereS.

adr¯a is anticipating Hume’s rejection of the rationalist

concept of causality, by arguing that there is neither a logical

nor a metaphysical relationship between cause and effect. Only

the subject’s *own* understanding determines “causality,” and hence

defines priority in being. However,S.

adr¯a’s position is distinct from

Hume’s in that S.

adr¯a does accept “real priority” (*taqaddum bi-alh.*

*aq¯ıqa*), which he states to be priority of a thing over that which is

existent because of it. So S.

adr¯a’s view is more realist than Hume’s,

where mere “perception” is the only observed “relation” between

two things.

It seems to me, though, that *taqaddum bi-al-h. aqq* is compatible

with the Illuminationist position that being is equivocal, and

the ensuing doctrine that beings are ranked in a priority of nobility.

S.

adr¯a’s position on “true priority” does favor the “religious”

view of creation, evoking as it does a unique relation between God

and what he creates; and he insists that we must know the truth

(*h.*

*aqq*) immediately in order to understand the “causal” connection

between two things related “in terms of truth.” Still he does not

reject the traditional understanding of other types of causation, but

only claims that it does not capture “priority in terms of truth.”

This places his thinking within philosophy rather than religion

as such.

From the sixteenth century to the present, Islamic philosophy has

been dominated by a scholastic tradition that continues in its interpretation

of the ideals of classical Arabic philosophy, and leads to the

final acceptance of philosophy by religion. InS.

adr¯a’s unified system,

the select religious scholars, possessing knowledge and inspiration,

were confirmed as the legitimate “guardians” of just rule. This system

also became the basis for the continuity of philosophy. Although

higher philosophy is today still mostly studied only “extracurricularly”

(*doru¯ s-e kha¯ rej*), the scholastic tradition has incorporated

certain aspects of philosophy into its core curricula. For instance,

semantics is included in the study of the principles of jurisprudence,

and a standard, simplified formal logic is included in “primers” studied

by all beginning seminary students. Representative members of

the Sh¯ı‘ite clergy propose also the doctrine of independent reason

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(*ijtiha¯d*) in principles of jurisprudence,whichmarks the final harmonization

of philosophy with religion.37 The dominant philosophical

themes in the past centuries have been ontology, creation and cosmology,

theories of knowledge (especially unified theories deemed

capable of describing extraordinary types of knowing such as inspiration

and intuition), psychology (though this has been reduced in the

main to eschatology), philosophical hermeneutics, and a few other

similar topics. Much more work remains to be done inWestern scholarship

on this recent philosophical tradition, and this work needs to

begin from the realization that there is much here that is genuinely

philosophical.

notes

1 Thewide-ranging intellectual impact of Iranian influences has led some,

notably the late French Orientalist Henry Corbin, to give the name

“Iranian Islam” to many domains of inquiry and expression including

the philosophical. See Corbin [161].

2 Phrases like “Oriental wisdom” (as in Corbin’s translation of *h.*

*ikma*

*al-ishra¯q* as “sagesse orientale”) and “transcendent theosophy” misrepresent

the analytical value of the philosophy of Illumination, presenting

it as mystical or visionary, rather than presenting Islamic philosophy as

philosophy.

3 Rahman [167], vii.

4 See H. Ziai, “Shih¯ab al-D¯ın Suhraward¯ı: founder of the Illuminationist

school,” in Nasr and Leaman [34], vol.1, and chapter 10 above.

5 See Shams al-D¯ın Shahraz ¯ ur¯ı, *Sharh. h.ikma al-Ishra¯q*, ed. H. Ziai

(Tehran: 2001), 7.

6 See the recent work by Sadughi [258], which shows that all of the hundreds

of philosophers from the seventeenth century to the present were

from the ‘*ulam¯ a*’, with the notable exception of Muh. ammad H.

asan

Qashqai and Jah¯ang¯ır Qashqai (see pp. 30, 84, 105, 167), who were noble

tribal Qashqai khans.

7 Given S.

adr¯a’s explicitly philosophical aims, this term is to be preferred

to the prevalent “transcendent philosophy.” In almost every

contemporary Persian book on intellectual subjects S.

adr¯a is rightly

hailed for his success in describing a *rational* (*‘aql¯ı*) system, which

is thought to lend philosophical legitimacy to Sh¯ı‘ism as a whole.

See Sadughi (258) for lists of Sh¯ı‘ite scholastics who have taught

S.

adr¯a.

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8 A¯ shtiya¯nı¯ is perhaps the leading creative thinker in the scholastic

Sh¯ı‘ite world. He is one of the few Sh¯ı‘ite scholastics who, because

of his scholarly collaboration with Henry Corbin, is known toWestern

scholarship at least in name, and a few of his text editions of philosophical

work are also known. For a simple overview of the epistemological

stance see Sohravardı¯, *Partow Na¯meh* (*The Book of Radiance*), ed. and

trans. with an introduction by H. Ziai (Costa Mesa, CA: 1998), xvi–xx.

See also Yazdi [157].

9 See further Ziai [262].

10 S.

adr al-Dı¯n al-Shı¯ra¯zı¯, *al-Asfa¯ r al-arba‘a* (Tehran: n.d.), vol. VI, 180ff.

11 See Hossein Ziai, “The Manuscript of *al-Shajara al-Ila¯hiyya*, a Philosophical

Encyclopedia by Shams al-Dı¯nMuh. ammad Shahrazu¯ rı¯,” *Ira¯n*

*Shina¯ sı¯* 2 (1990), 89–108.

12 *Asfa¯ r*, vol. VI, 187.

13 See Ziai, “The Manuscript of *al-Shajara al-Ila¯hiyya*.”

14 Al-R¯az¯ı’s *al-Mab¯ ah.*

*ith al-mashriqiyya* ought not to be considered an

Illuminationist work as some have suggested: see ‘Al¯ı As. ghar H.

alab¯ı,

*Ta¯ rikh-e Fala¯ sefe-ye I¯ra¯nı¯* (Tehran: n.d.), 123.

15 *Asfa¯ r*, vol. VI, 187.

16 See Ziai [158], ch. 1.

17 See Ziai [158], 34–9.

18 See for instance *Asfa¯ r*, vol. III, 509ff.

19 I have prepared a critical edition of part I of this work, which is now in

press (Tehran: forthcoming). A¯ shtiya¯nı¯ makes ample use of this text;

see his *Sharh. -eh.*

*¯ al va ¯ ar ¯ a-ye falsaf¯ı-yeMull ¯ aS.*

*adra¯* (*The Life and Philosophical*

*Doctrine of Mull ¯ aS.*

*adra¯* ) (Qom: 1998), 228–31.

20 See Ibn Taymiyya, *Against the Greek Logicians*, trans. W. B. Hallaq

(Oxford: 1993).

21 Given Ibn Torkeh’s obscurity inWestern scholarship I will provide the

reader with a fairly detailed list of references: J. Na’ini’s introduction

to his Persian translation of Sharast¯an¯ı’s *al-Milal wa al-nih.*

*al*, titled

*Tanq¯ıh. al-adilla* (Tehran: 1335 A.H.); M.-T. Danesh-Pajouh, *Fehrest-e*

*Keta¯b-Kha¯ne-ye Ehda¯ ’ı¯-ye SeyyedMohamad-eMeshka¯ t* (Tehran: 1332

A.H.), vol. III, 425ff.; H. Corbin [161], vol. III (Paris: 1972); S. A. M.

Behbahani, “Ah. v¯al va ¯ As ¯ar-e S.

¯a’in al-D¯ın Torkeh-ye Is.fah¯an¯ı,” in

Mohaghegh and Landolt [255], 87–145; Sadughi [258]. S.

¯a’in al-D¯ın’s

work *Tamh. ı¯d al-qawa¯ ‘id* has been edited by S. J. D. A¯ shtiya¯nı¯ with a

200-page analytical introduction, and glosses on the work. There have

been previous lithograph editions, not free of error.

22 Sadughi [258], 25, 45, 47, 61.

23 See S.

a¯ ’in al-Dı¯n, *Tamh. ı¯d al-qawa¯ ‘id*, 3–8. A¯ shtiya¯nı¯’s seminal study

documents S.

¯a’in al-D¯ın’s impact on Mull¯a Moh. sen Fayd. -e K¯ash¯ı,

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‘Abd al-Razz¯aq La¯hı¯jı¯, and other Shı¯‘ite *‘ulama¯ ’*, and shows why

Mı¯r Fendereskı¯, Baha¯ ’ al-Dı¯n ‘A¯ melı¯, Mı¯r Da¯ma¯d, and Mulla¯ S. adra¯

acknowledged S.

¯a’in al-D¯ın’s thought. See further A. M. Behbahani,

“Ah. v¯al va ¯ As ¯ar-eS.

¯a’in al-D¯ın Torkeh-ye Is.fah¯an¯ı,” in Mohaghegh and

Landolt [255], xvi–xxii.

24 For a discussion of the new structure see, for example, Suhraward¯ı

[152], xxiii–xxviii.

25 Perhaps the best anthology is Corbin and A¯ shtiya¯nı¯ [254]. Twelve treatises

have been published as *Majm¯ u‘eh-ye ras ¯ a’il-e falsaf¯ı-ye S.*

*adr almuta’allih*

*¯ın*, edited by H. N. Is.fah¯an¯ı (Tehran: 1966). Works of the

significant nineteenth-century scholastic, H¯ad¯ı Sabziw¯ar¯ı, have been

edited as *Ras ¯ a’el-e h.*

*akı¯m Sabzeva¯ rı¯*, ed. S. J. D. A¯ shtiya¯nı¯ (Tehran:

1991). Also useful for the study of Arabic and Persian philosophy, especially

concerning scholastic figures, is the journal *Kherad-na¯meh-ye*

*Mull ¯ aS.*

*adra¯* .

26 For example, numerous short monographs responded to Ibn

Kammu¯ na’s paradox on whether the Necessary Being is unique.

27 See *Majm¯ u‘eh-ye ras ¯ a’il-e falsaf¯ı-yeS.*

*adr al-muta’allih¯ın*, 193–236.

28 This was at the time an important center of learning, which produced

several scholars that would influence the development of the “school

of Is.fah¯an.” For a discussion of the main scholastic philosophers of

Sh¯ır ¯az see Q. K¯ak¯a’¯ı, “M¯ır S.

adr al-Dı¯n Dashtakı¯,” *Kherad-na¯meh* 1,

3.3 (1996), 83–9. S.

adr al-D¯ın Dashtak¯ı and his son, Ghiy¯ath al-D¯ın

Dashtak¯ı, are two outstanding figures of sixteenth-century trends in

philosophy; the father wrote a monograph on *Ithba¯ t al-Wa¯ jib* (*Proof*

*of the Necessary Being*), which as mentioned above is a representative

work of the philosophical genres of this period. Another of his monographs

on ontology is titled *Risa¯ la fı¯ wuju¯ d al-dhihnı¯* (*Treatise on the*

*Ideal* or *Mental Being*). Both these works were extensively read later,

notably byS.

adra¯ , who mentions them in his *Asfa¯ r*. The son, Ghiya¯ th

al-D¯ınDashtak¯ı, wrote a commentary on one of Suhraward¯ı’s less technical

Illuminationist texts, *Haya¯kil al-nu¯ r*.

29 Semantic theory in general, called *‘ilmdal ¯ ala al-alf ¯ az.*

, continues as an

initial chapter (*ba¯b*, or *fas. l*) of textbooks on the “principles of jurisprudence”

(*us.*

*u¯ l al-fiqh*), but is totally removed from the philosophical

discourse as such in the later tradition.

30 See, e.g., *Risa¯ leh-ye ‘ibra al-fud. ala¯ ’ fı¯ h. all shubha jadhr al-as.amm*, by

yet another of the sixteenth–seventeenth-century scholastic figures,

Shams al-Dı¯nMuh. ammad Khafrı¯, ed. A. F.Qaramaleki, *Kherad-na¯meh*

1, 4.4 (1996), 86–9. Here the paradoxical proposition is “all of my statements

now are false.” Note that here, in the title of the paradox, the

phrase “all my statements are false” is replaced by *jadhr al-as.amm*,

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“the square root of an imaginary number” (the term *as.amm* stands for

the square root of −1; literally it means “the most dumb,” i.e., “devoid

of sense”). The implication here, anticipating the analysis of the paradox

in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is that the proposition

is itself devoid of sense, like asking “what is the square root of −1?”

according to the mathematics of the day.

31 See A. F. Qaramelaki, “Mo‘amm¯a-ye jadhr-e as.amm darh.

owzeh-ye falsaf

¯ı-ye Sh¯ır ¯az (The Liar Paradox in the Philosophical Circle of Sh¯ır ¯ az),”

*Kherad-na¯meh* 1, 4.4 (1996), 80–5. The author lists (82 nn. 12–17)

some of the earlier known presentations of the liar paradox in Arabic

and Persian, the oldest by al-F ¯ar¯ab¯ı, the most important by Ibn

Kammu¯ na.

32 Jala¯ l al-Dı¯n Dawwa¯nı¯, *Naha¯ya al-kala¯m fı¯ h. all shubha kull kala¯mı¯*

*ka¯dhib*, ed. A. F. Qaramelaki, *Na¯meh-ye mofı¯d* 5 (1996).

33 On notions of being in theS.

adrian tradition, there is as yet no fully adequate

treatment, but a good place to start is Rahman [167]. Excellent,

though a bit outdated in style, is M. H‥ orten, *Philosophische von Shirazi*

(Halle: 1912). The best accounts in Persian are those by A¯ shtiya¯nı¯:

not only his *Sharh. -e h.*

*¯ al va ¯ ar ¯ a-ye falsaf¯ı-ye Mull ¯ a S.*

*adra¯* (*On Mulla¯*

*S.*

*adra¯ ’s Life and his Philosophical Ideas*) (Qom: 1999), but also an independent

work called*Hast¯ı* (*Being*) (Tehran, several reprints),which may

be recommended as a representative and engaging work from the recent

scholastic tradition.

34 I have prepared an edition of the *Ta‘lı¯qa¯ t*, which is now in press; unfortunately

only a lithograph has so far been available (Tehran: 1313 A.H.),

and this is nigh impossible to use.

35 He does so against the background of his distinct Illuminationist epistemology.

S.

adr¯a holds that knowledge by presence is prior to knowledge

acquired through syllogistic reasoning, especially in the case of

first principles and knowledge of the Necessary Being. And he further

holds that knowledge of a thing is primarily knowledge of its cause. The

Peripatetics are said to be unable to demonstrate the Necessary Being,

since everything is known by its cause, and the Necessary Existent has

no cause. Now, knowledge by presence takes place when the knowing

subject (*al-mudrik*) has an atemporal “relation” (*al-id.*

*a¯ fa*) to the

object (*al-mudrak*), as we saw above.Whensuch knowledge is obtained,

the “cause” is known in a durationless “instant” (*a¯n*). But, following

the Illuminationists, there is no order of priority between knower and

known; this is the position discussed in what follows. The view solves

not only the problem of how we know God, but also rejects temporal

priority as the basis for distinguishing cause and effect, as will become

clear below.

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36 In other words the four discussed by Aristotle at *Categories*, 14a26–

b15, plus causation.

37 This is exemplified by many twentieth-century jurists also known

and revered for their philosophical teachings, such as Abu¯ al-

H.

asan Qazv¯ın¯ı, All¯ameh H.

usayn T.

aba¯ t.aba¯ ’ı¯, Mehdı¯ A¯ shtiya¯nı¯, Jala¯ l

A¯ shtiya¯nı¯, and Mehdı¯ Ha’irı¯ Yazdı¯.

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select bibliography and

further reading

This bibliography is intended to supply the reader with references to basic

works for further reading on the subject. After some general works, several

suggestions have been supplied for each chapter. The bibliography is not

intended to be comprehensive, but merely to provide an initial resource. For

a comprehensive bibliography of secondary literature on Arabic philosophy

up to the year 1999 see:

Daiber, H. [1] *Bibliography of Islamic Philosophy*, 2 vols. (Leiden: 1999).

There is also a bibliography that has been published in installments:

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recently in *MIDEO* 24 (2000), 381–414. An updated version appears at

http://philosophy.cua.edu/tad/biblio.cfm.

There are several journals that routinely publish articles on Arabic philosophy.

*Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* and *Zeitschrift fu¨ r Geschichte der*

*arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften* are particularly focused on this area.

Relevant articles also appear frequently in journals devoted to medieval philosophy,

such as *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*,

*Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, and *Recherches de philosophie et*

*th´eologiem´edi ´evales,* and also in journals devoted toMiddle Eastern studies,

such as *Der Islam*, *Islamic Studies, M´ elanges de l’Institut dominicain des*

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