Chapter IX
Islamic Philosophy (*Falsafa*)

Islamic philosophy is an attempt to harmonise faith (*imān*) and intellect (*'aql*) or Islamic revelation (*wahy*) and philosophy. As its name implies it refers to the philosophical activity within the Islamic cultural milieu. Its main sources are the Qurʾānic revelation and the Hellenic heritage which Muslims inherited when Alexandria, Syria and Jundishapur came under Muslim rule. Judaism, Christianity and Islam value the study of the ancient Greek philosophers, and share common heritage and questions raised by all human beings, particularly the problem of evil, creation *ex nihilo*, afterlife, miracles, free will and predestination, etc. Finally, these three religions see the world as God's creation hence many thinkers were challenged by the question of how to reconcile their religious world-views with science.

Islam has produced many great philosophers – al-Fārābī (875-950), Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, 980-1037), Averroes (Ibn Rushd, 1126-1198), etc. Al-Fārābī and Avicenna formulated the distinction between necessary and contingent being, and this distinction was of great importance throughout the modern period in the West. Nevertheless, the Muslim philosophers are still not very well-known, because medieval philosophy is of a rather abstract and esoteric nature. There are unfortunately very few western universities offering courses in Islamic philosophy.

The Legacy of Hellenic Philosophy and the Translations of Philosophical Texts

Philosophy refers to the Science of Wisdom as defined by ancient Hellenic thinkers. It embraces all branches of knowledge. Islamic philosophy refers to the Science of Wisdom adopted by Muslim philosophers who, in general, were the successors of Neo-Platonism combining Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Pythagorean, Gnostic, and

Hermetic ideas. Their sources were mainly Greek: Plato, Aristotle, the commentators (Alexander and Themistius), Galen, Plotinus, Proclus, etc.

When the Arabs captured Alexandria in 641, they were brought into contact with diverse cultures: Egyptian, Phoenician, Persian, Jewish, Christian, and Greek. Since the time of Alexander the Great, Greek culture had flourished in Egypt. Neo-Platonism, founded by the Egyptian Plotinus (d. 270) and his Syrian disciple Porphyry of Tyre (d. 303), was particularly influential. This Neo-platonic school of thought was attempting to harmonize Platonism, Aristotelian philosophy, Pythagoreanism, and Stoicism. One major work called *Āthulugia* (Theology) translated probably from Syriac was erroneously attributed to Aristotle. The majority of scholars believe this work to be a commentary of Porphyry on the last three volumes (IV, V and VI) of Plotinus' *Enneads*.

In the IXth century Greek philosophy was not anymore taught in Europe and its teaching was banned by the Church. The Muslim philosophers revived Greek philosophy and it was through al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) and Averroes (Ibn Rushd) that the West learnt about Aristotle, Plato and Socrates. Islamic philosophers embraced Greek philosophy while Western Europe was going through the Dark Age. The ʿAbbāsid Caliphate, influenced by Persian culture, favored the development of learning especially philosophy. The Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (786-809) had some of the works of Aristotle translated into Arabic for the first time. Yahia Ibn al-Bitrīq (d. 815), for instance, translated Plato's *Timaeus*, Aristotle's *De Anima*, *The Book of Animals*, *Analytica Prioria* (Fakhry, 7-8). The following Caliph Ma'mūn al-Rashīd founded the House of Wisdom (*Dar al-Hikma*) where eminent translators were paid to translate books from foreign languages into Arabic. His court attracted scholars from all parts of the world. The translation of the works of Aristotle and Plato gave an impulse to Islamic philosophy. The harmonization of Greek philosophy with Islam began with al-Kindī and was pursued by later philosophers such as al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes. The Islamic philosophical tradition has a twelve-century-long continuous history and is still alive today. This chapter on Islamic philosophy (*falsafa*) is not exhaustive; it briefly introduces the reader to the most influential Islamic philosophers.

The Qur'ān: Foundation of Islamic Thought

All Islamic philosophers have lived in a universe dominated by the reality of the Qur'ān and the spoken and acted example (*sunna*) of Prophet Muhammad. The most famous among them, such as Avicenna and Averroes, were deeply religious and eager to defend Islam against any attacks without being simply fideists. The advent of the Qur'ānic revelation was to transform substantially the milieu in which Islamic philosophers were to philosophize, leading to a specific kind of philosophy which can be justly called "Prophetic philosophy."

In Islam the Qur'ān is accepted as the supreme source of knowledge. The prophetic consciousness, illuminated by the light of revelation (*wahy*), remained of supreme significance for Islamic philosophers. Starting with Avicenna, many have commented on the nocturnal ascent (*mi'rāj*) of Prophet Muhammad. This central episode in the life of the Prophet has numerous levels of meaning. The term *Hākim* (Wise, from the same root as *Hikma*) a Name of God is also applied to the Prophet in the Qur'ān (see Chapter XXXI) who is, according to Islamic philosophers, an exponent of the true philosophy or Wisdom (*Hikma*). The Aristotelian notion of the intellect (νοῦς *noûs*) was adapted and transformed by Muslim Philosophers to the context of the Islamic faith. In Avicenna's view the Active Intellect (*al-'Aql al-Faʿʿāl*) became equated with the Holy Spirit (*al-Rūh al-Quds*) or the Archangel Gabriel.

The Qur'ān and the Islamic tradition have both an outward (*zāhir*) and an inward (*bātin*) dimension. For the Islamic philosophers, the external dimension of the Qur'ānic revelation concerns how humans should behave in society while the inner Truth (*Haqīqa*) constitutes the heart of Islamic knowledge. This term is of the greatest significance for Islamic philosophers since it is related to God Himself who bears the name *al-Haqq* (the Truth), whose discovery is the goal of Islamic philosophy. The *Haqīqa*, the inner Truth of the Qur'ān, can be uncovered through hermeneutic. Much of Islamic philosophy is in fact a hermeneutic (*ta'wīl*) unveiling the *Haqīqa* of the Qur'ān and the cosmos. Islamic philosophy belongs to the same family as that of *Ma'rīfa* or gnosis based on an inner knowledge which characterized both Sufism and Shīʿism.

Mu'tazilism

Islamic theology is concerned with ascertaining the context of the Islamic revelation and with understanding its meaning in order to determine what Muslims should believe. The Islamic theologians (*mutakallimūn*) were apologists who wanted to uphold, through their rational dialectic, their religious credo. In the Middle Age, an important school of theology was founded by the Mu'tazilites (from *itazala*, to separate oneself, to dissent). They derived their name from a verse in the Qur'ān (XVIII: 16) where the ideal believers had separated from the unbelievers. The Mu'tazilites sought to introduce philosophical principles from Greek rationalism into Islamic thought. They believe that all knowledge necessary for the salvation of man derives from his intellect and rational thinking. This school had a profound influence on the thought of many Muslim philosophers.

From the IXth century onward, owing to the ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Ma'mūn (d. 218/833), Greek philosophy was introduced in the empire. The Caliph upheld the doctrines of the rationalist Mu'tazilites who believe mainly in a fivefold credo. i) God is an absolute Unity (*Tawhīd*) therefore no attribute can be ascribed to Him. The Divine attributes cannot possess any positive reality distinct from the Divine Essence; to affirm the reality of Divine attributes would lead to admit the existence of multiple gods. The Mu'tazilites apply the same logic to the Qur'ān. They deny the doctrine that the Qur'ān is uncreated, because this would mean that something else besides God would exist eternally leading to a dualism. Thus, the Qur'ān is created by God. ii) The principle of Divine Justice (*'Adl*) involves that man is a free agent responsible for his actions. iii) God will fulfill his promises in the hereafter. iv) Muslims who commit a grave sin, are in an intermediate category situated between a believer and an unbeliever. v) The Muslims must practice the principles of justice and liberty in their daily life.

Shī'ism

The origin of Shī'ī Islām goes back to the issue of succession following Muhammad's death. For the Shī'ites, Muhammad explicitly designated (*nass jalī*) his cousin and son-in-law 'Alī Ibn Abī Tālib as his Successor by God's command. Shī'ī Islam, since its beginning, has given enormous importance on the human capacity to use its intellect to serve the purpose of faith. The Shī'ites rely on the teaching of the direct Heirs of the Prophet (i.e. the direct descendants of 'Alī) to apprehend faith.

The first Imām 'Alī (d. 40/661) had the title of Prince of faithful (*Amīr al-mu'minīn*). The saying attributed to him describes Islam as a faith of the Intellect, i.e. Intellect is another facet of faith. The heart is the source of wisdom, with the ear as its channel. Philosophy is a tree growing in the heart, and bearing its fruits on the tongue. Belief and wisdom are twin brother; God accepts not the one without the other (Ibn Abī Tālib n.d.: 33-34). There is an intimate bond between intellect and faith. For Shī'ites, it is primordial to practice the faith with understanding. Imām 'Alī transmitted the following tradition "intellect (*'aql*) in the heart is like a lamp in the centre of the house (Ibn Babawayh 1385/1966: 1/bāb 86, 98 no. 1; Amir-Moezzi 1994: 48)." The intellect illuminates the faith and becomes a dimension of the interpretation of faith. 'Alī explained that Islam is affirmation (*iqrar*) whereas faith (*īmān*) is both affirmation and true inner knowing (*Ma'rīfa*). *Ma'rīfa* is the foundation of the faith. (Steigerwald, 2000, 26-39). This emphasis on the necessity to use the human intellect to its fullest capacity explained why Islamic philosophy was mainly upheld by Shī'ites.

Ismā'īlism

The Ismā'īlīs maintained the Shī'ī doctrine of *Imāma* which is the foundation of the Ismā'īlī theosophy; it is based on the necessity on a divinely inspired and sinless (*ma'sūm*) Imām. The Imām possesses a Knowledge (*'Ilm*) and a perfect understanding of the Qur'ān as well as the religious law (*sharī'a*). The Ismā'īlīs attempted to raise human consciousness to a higher plane; they were not at all the irreligious libertines their adversaries often represented them as. On the contrary, they were dedicated to a life of service and self-improvement. Their goal was wholly spiritual. Ismā'īlism is neither a philosophy nor a theology, but it is a theosophy or "Divine Wisdom." The Ismā'īlīs built

one of the most remarkable speculative systems from i) the Qur'ān, ii) the science of the cosmos, and iii) Neo-Platonism. These three elements were interwoven to give a rich and coherent worldview.

Towards the end of the Xth century an Ismāʿīlī philosophical society known as Ikhwān al-Safāʾ (Brethren of Purity) flourished in Basra. They wrote an encyclopedia of fifty-one volumes developing the idea of goodness and moral perfection trying to reconcile religion with science. They had a leaning towards Pythagorean speculations "since the science of number is the root of all the other sciences, the essence of wisdom, the source of every cognition and the element of all meanings." (*Ikhwān al-Safāʾ* vol. I, 21 excerpt translated by Majid Fakhry 2000: 56) They started with the one which is not a number but a symbol of perfect unity and indivisibility. From the addition of one to one in sequence multiplicity emerges, hence one is the ground of all number like God who is the First Principle of all things. The properties of number result from the very nature of things. The study of the science of number enables the searcher to discover the physical world which is a reflection of the Divine world. He can find out the genera and species of all things and the Divine Wisdom underlying the appropriate quantities of their elements. Every science and discipline has its own balances (*mawāzīn*) culminating in the right Balance mentioned in the Qur'ān (XVII: 35 and XXVI: 182) and the notion of Justice (*'Adl*) which will be manifested on the Day of Resurrection. The study of numbers leads to the knowledge of the soul in which numbers subsist and as mentioned in a Prophetic *hadīth* (saying attributed to Muhammad) by knowing himself the Muslim discover his Lord. For instance, the number four mirrors the quadruple nature of the spiritual world composed of God, the Universal Intellect, the Universal Soul, and Prime Matter. This explains why God created four elements, four humors, four seasons, four directions, etc. From the Divine Light emanates the Active Intellect, succeeded by the Universal Soul of the spheres, and finally by Prime Matter.

For the Brethren of Purity, there is no major conflict between religion and philosophy. As in Plato's philosophy and in the Bible, their goal is to imitate God to the best of human capacity. Philosophy has the merit to teach the philosophers not to stop at the external meaning of revelation like the common people would, but to dig further to perceive the hidden and inner dimension (*bātin*). The cause of irreligion (*kufr*) and

ignorance come from the fact that some Muslims interpret literally the Qur'ān and believe that God on the Last Day will summon the good to indulge in carnal pleasures such as the deflowering of virgins and the drinking of alcohol. For the Brethren, these verses are pure allegories alluding to spiritual truths. Hell, for instance, is in this physical world while Paradise lies in the spiritual world.

Historical Survey of some Great Islamic Philosophers

Al-Kindī (d. 257/870), known as the "Philosopher of the Arabs," translated and wrote commentaries on a number of works by Aristotle. The debate between revelation and reason began during his time. The ideas of al-Kindī defending the supremacy of intellect (*'aql*) and the importance of Greek philosophy, a foreign science, were not really appreciate when al-Mutawakkil became Caliph and sought to restore traditionalism and anti-intellectualism.

Al-Kindī's best known treatise is *Fī al-Falsafa al-Ūlā* (On First Philosophy) where he propounds the notion of creation *ex nihilo* and do not adhere to Aristotle's eternity of the world. God, through the Act of primordial origination (*Ibdā'*), becomes the cause of the existence of the world and the apparition of the First Intellect from which emanates the hierarchy of Intellects. Between God and the physical world is the world of Soul responsible for the creation of the world of Heavenly spheres. Al-Kindī describes the first philosophy as the highest philosophy, since it focuses on the First Cause (God) who is prior in time because He is the cause of time. Like the Muʿtazilites, al-Kindī states that God does not have any attributes. God is indefinable, unchanging, and imperishable. By the study of philosophy, people can learn about the Unity of God and human virtue. Al-Kindī emphasizes the importance of the human intellect (*'aql*) over the material world because it survives after death. Like the Stoics, al-Kindī exhorts Muslims to concentrate on the life of the mind, not of the body. He advocates maintaining an internal balance between the material and the intellectual life. One should not attach oneself excessively to worldly goods which are ephemeral in nature.

Muhammad b. Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī (Rhazès) (d. 311/923), a Platonist philosopher and a physician, was born around 864 at Rayy, a city twelve kilometers south of Tehran. He worked as the head of a hospital in Rayy. Afterwards he traveled extensively and

worked for a while in a hospital in Baghdad. At the end of his life, he returned to Rayy. His philosophical work was lost, but some excerpts were preserved in Ismāʿīlī works. Al-Rāzī adopted the Muʿtazilite atomism and developed a theory of creation that would not require any change in God or attribute to Him responsibility for the imperfection of creation. The world was created in time out of a Pre-Existing Matter. According to al-Rāzī, there were five eternal principles—God, Soul, Prime Matter, Space, and Time. Probably influenced by Gnostic, Harrānean, Manichean, and Platonic sources, he explained the creation of the world as the result of the unexpected and sudden turn of events (*falta*) which occurs when the Soul, in her ignorance, desires matter. Afterwards God helps the Soul to satisfy her desire allowing her to enter the material world, and then He creates humans and gives them an intellect to make them realize their mistake and deliver them from their union with matter, the cause of their suffering and of all evil. The humans who are overpowered by physical pleasures will remain in the cycle of rebirths unless they start to study philosophy the ultimate source of redemption.

Ismāʿīlī thinkers entered in controversy with Rhazès because he held that all wise men are equally inspired and able to know the truth about the wisdom of the past. He rejected the notions of Prophecy and revelation (*wahy*). His definition of religion as a tool employed by tyrants over men that exploits their credulity, perpetuates ignorance, and leads to conflicts, was very similar to the one of Karl Marx developed many centuries later. By his rejection of Prophecy, Rhazès was clearly not a Muslim nor an Islamic philosopher.

Abū Nasr al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), considered as the Second Master after Aristotle, was born at Wasīj near Fārāb in Transoxiana. This philosopher was most probably Shīʿite because in 941 he received the protection of Sayf al-Dawla from the Hamdānid Shīʿī dynasty. Al-Fārābī was the founder of the Turkish School of Philosophy. He was an exponent of Neo-Platonic Philosophy, a system originated by al-Kindī. Like Plato, al-Fārābī is a mystical thinker who considers that contemplation dominates action.

Al-Fārābī elaborates a metaphysics of essences adopted by many later Islamic philosophers. He distinguishes between essence and existence in created beings. Existence is an accident of essence. The First Being, necessary by Himself, is

differentiated from all other contingent beings who cannot exist by themselves. The First Being, the Cause of all existing things, is perfect, eternal beyond matter and form. He is an Intellect in act and also the object of his own intellection (i.e. intelligible in act). As Aristotle, in *Metaphysics* XII: 9, he defines this Being as "Thought thinking thought." Like Plotinus and Proclus the creation of the world emanates from His superabundant Goodness.

From the First Being emanates the First Intellect following the principle from the One only the One can proceed. When the First Intellect contemplates his source (First Being) he gives birth to a second Intellect; when he turns his attention toward himself, from him emerges the first heaven and its soul. Similarly when the second Intellect contemplates his Source he gives rise to the third Intellect and when he apprehends himself he brings forth the second heaven and its soul. These acts of contemplation are repeated by each Intellect in the spiritual hierarchy up to the Tenth Intellect. From the latter emanates the sublunary world composed of matter and form. The Tenth Intellect or the Active Intellect is the Giver of forms (*Wāhib al-suwar*) to matter and he also transmits the knowledge of these forms to the human intellect. The latter can be subdivided into the theoretical intellect and the practical intellect. The theoretical intellect can pass through three states: potential intellect in relation to knowledge, intellect in act when it acquires knowledge and acquired intellect (*'aql mustafād*) when he receives, through illumination, the forms from the Active Intellect.

Al-Fārābī organized the sciences in a hierarchy starting with logics, physics, mathematic, and metaphysics culminating in a Prophetic philosophy whose object is the realization of spiritual happiness. This Prophetic philosophy is of Platonic inspiration where the concept of a virtuous city serves as an ethical model encompassing all the earth. At the head of the virtuous city stands an ideal leader like Plato's Philosopher-King. This virtuous Imām (Guide) is a Philosopher by the perfection of his theoretical faculties and a Prophet by his strong imagination and his capacity to foretell the future. The Imām enters regularly in conjunction with the Active Intellect which is the ultimate degree of happiness. His goal is to help his disciples to achieve this state of conjunction with the Active Intellect who is also identified to the Archangel Gabriel. Contrary to al-Kindī, al-Fārābī does not think that Prophets and philosophers have

independent ways to attain the highest Truth. They both reach it through their conjunction with the Active Intellect. In this virtuous city, the rulers are philosophers who play an active role in society under the guidance of the Imām. The philosophers who can get access more easily to the world of intelligible concepts must learn to talk to the masses to transmit the philosophical knowledge which can liberate the soul.

Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna d. 428/1037), the most illustrious among the Islamic philosopher, who tried to harmonize philosophy with religion, was born at Afshana close to Bukhārā. As related in his autobiography, he was born into an Ismāʿīlī family. The fact that he had an argument with his father over the concept of the soul does not prove that he was not an Ismāʿīlī, as most scholars assume, since he did not argue on a dogma of Ismāʿīlī faith. There are as many levels of understanding of the notion of soul as there are members in the spiritual hierarchy. Moreover many undeniable similarities exist between the Avicennan universe and the Ismāʿīlī cosmology. Many scholars presuppose that he was a Twelver Shīʿite because he worked for the Princes of Hamadhān and Isfahān, however he could have remained secretly an Ismāʿīlī in a Twelver Shīʿī milieu. Ibn Sīnā had a scientific and progressive outlook. His main philosophical works are *Kitāb al-Shifā*, (The Book of Recovery), *Al-Najāt* (The Salvation) and *Kitāb al-Ishārāt* (The Book of Instructions). Many of his works focus on the dualism of mind and matter, God and the world. His mystical recitals describe a spiritual journey toward the mystical Orient.

Ibn Sīnā adopts the metaphysics of essence and the theory of creation of al-Fārābī, nevertheless he expounds his philosophical doctrines. He distinguishes the Necessary Being from the contingent universe, than he proceeds to prove His existence. If beings exist they must be either necessary or contingent. If necessary, then the Necessary Being is proved. If contingent their existence must rely ultimately on a Necessary Being. The existence of contingent beings cannot rely on an unlimited series of causes. The Necessary Being is also a complete Unity exempt of any composition. If He was composed of essence and existence like other beings, it would be necessary for Him to have a cause to bring His essence into existence. Therefore the Necessary Being has no essence apart from His existence.

In his attempt to harmonize philosophy and religious beliefs, Ibn Sīnā proved the immortality of the soul in rational terms before René Descartes (d. 1650). According to

him, a man suddenly created would, if he was floating in the air incapable to sense his own limbs and the external world, be able to perceive his personal existence. Man has a direct consciousness of his self and he can imagine himself even when he is cut off from the function of his external senses. This is how Ibn Sīnā proves that the soul is indivisible, immaterial, and eternal substance. The human soul is distinguished from other souls by his capacity to control his body, the formation of moral habits, and the acquisition of knowledge. Though the body is not resurrected after the death, the human soul survives and retains all the individual perfections or imperfections, acquired during his life on earth and in this sense he will be rewarded or punished for his past deeds.

Abū Hāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) the influential Sunnī Ashʿarite theologian, jurist and Sufi thinker renounced the life of pleasure and wandered in the Islamic world in search of the truth. "If Avicenna is a much discussed figure, al-Ghazzālī is discussed much more. Some see him, as a reactionary who brought to an end the blossoming of the rational thought of the philosophers, and made supreme a theology which was itself the slave of dogma." (Arnaldez, 773) His attacks against the Islamic philosophers were also aimed at the Fātimid Ismāʿīlī dynasty of Cairo. Al-Ghazzālī wrote the *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-dīn* which is a great ethical work. He criticized the rationalistic views of his predecessors including that of Avicenna and ultimately found a refuge in Sufism. His harsh criticism of philosophy was afterwards rebuked by Averroes. Towards the end of the XIIth century, the theology became mainly dominated by the Ashʿarite orthodoxy.

Al-Ghazzālī was mainly responsible for infusing esoteric tradition into Sunnī Islam. He tried to reconcile the religion with philosophy but not in a purely rational way. He studied various traditional Islamic sciences in the northern part of Iran. Afterwards he moved to Baghdād and he was appointed head of the Nizāmiyya College in 1091 by the Saljūq *Wazīr* Nizām al-Mulk. There he was busy lecturing on Islamic jurisprudence and theology. Four years later, however, al-Ghazzālī fell into a serious existential crisis and finally left Baghdad, renouncing his career and the world. After wandering for about two years and completing the pilgrimage to Makka, he returned to Tūs where he became engaged in Sufi practice, writing and teaching his disciples until his death.

Al-Ghazzālī explained in his autobiography why he renounced his great career. He realized that there was no way to certain knowledge except through Sufism. The certainty, of revelatory truth cannot be reached by reason. Through his own spiritual experience, he worked to revive the Muslim faith by reconstructing the religious sciences upon the basis of Sufism, and the theoretical foundation of philosophy.

The inner development leading to his conversion to Sufism is explained in his autobiography, *al-Munqidh min al-dālal* (The Deliverer from Error), written at the end of his life. He examined the teachings of "the seekers after truth": the theologians, philosophers, Ismāʿīlīs and Sufis to finally conclude that the truth lies in Sufism. It is unfortunate that al-Ghazzālī failed to grasp the mystical dimension of the Islamic philosophers and Ismāʿīlīs (cf. see his book entitled *Kitāb al-Mustazhiriyya*). In fact many great Islamic philosophers were mystics such as al-Fārābī, Avicenna, etc. How can a bright mind as al-Ghazzālī miss the target and fell short to evaluate properly the Islamic philosophical tradition? Although al-Ghazzālī disapproved some elements of Islamic philosophy, he did not completely reject it. His relationship with philosophy was contradictory and complicated. He studied philosophy intensively while in Baghdad, composing *Maqasid al-Falāsifa* (The Intentions of the Philosophers), and then he criticized it in his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers).

Al-Ghazzālī accuses the Islamic philosophers of maintaining three theses which he considers against Muslim dogma: i) their belief in the eternity of the world, ii) their view that God does not know particulars, and iii) their denial of the resurrection of bodies. According to the Islamic philosophers, if God created the world at a certain moment in time that would presuppose a change in God, which is impossible. Further, why God would choose a particular moment in time for creation. Al-Ghazzālī replies that God's creation of the world was decided in the eternal past, and therefore it does not mean any change in God. Second, according to al-Ghazzālī, the philosophers deny God's knowledge of particulars and reducing it to His Self-Knowledge, since connecting God's knowledge with particulars would mean a change and plurality in God's essence. Al-Ghazzālī rejects this. The knowledge of all the particulars does not imply a change in God's eternal knowledge, even though the particulars change from moment to moment.

For Avicenna, the knowledge of the Necessary Being of particulars entails no change in His essence and is not comparable to human knowledge because He is the Cause of all particulars. As the First Principle of all existence, He knows Himself as the Cause of all things in a universal way. Avicenna explains: "nothing particular, however, escapes His knowledge; so that not even an atom's weight in the heavens or the earth escapes Him. This, indeed, is one of the wonders whose understanding requires a subtle acumen." (Ibn Sīnā 1986: 283 excerpt translated by Majid Farkry 2000: 52) Third, the philosophers deny the dogma of bodily resurrection, asserting that "the resurrection" means in reality the separation of the soul from the body after death.

Philosophy declined in the Sunnī world after al-Ghazzālī. Nearly a century later, Averroes made desperate efforts to defend the Islamic philosophers against the attacks of al-Ghazzālī's *Tahāfut* in his *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence) and *Fasl al-maqāl* (The Decisive Treatise), but he was unsuccessful to convince the Sunnī orthodoxy. The Islamic Philosophical tradition continued mainly in the Shīʿī world.

The father of Ibn Masarra, who was not an Arab, traveled to Basra where he was deeply touched by what he learned from the esoteric circles of the East. Afterwards he transmitted his knowledge to his son. When his father died in 899, Ibn Masarra started to teach this gnosis influenced by neo-Platonism about an ancient Sage Empedocles. Since he was not appreciated by the Emirate of Cordoba, he went in exile with two disciples and traveled toward Madīna and Makka to study in the Eastern schools. When a more tolerant Caliph came in power ʿAbd al-Rahmān III, he returned to Spain. According to many historiographers, Empedocles was the first among the five Pillars of Wisdom (Empedocles, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle). Empedocles was considered a humble philosopher, who refused all honors, traveled in the East and dedicated his life to spiritual teaching and practice. In the metaphysic of Ibn Masarra, the First Divine emanation is the Prime Matter followed by the Intellect, the Soul, Nature and Secondary Matter. This concept of Divine Prime Matter was later adopted by Solomon ben Gabīrōl and Ibn ʿArabī. The fact that Ibn Massarra places the One of Plotinus above the five substances has an Ismāʿīlī imprint where God is placed above being and non-being. Ibn Masarra used to explain the origin of the world in Gnostic terms: the Soul who has a

Divine origin committed a sin in the spiritual world which caused its union with the material body. Through the teachings of Prophets and spiritual exegesis, the Soul can acquire the knowledge necessary to go back to its origin. Since members of the school of Ibn Masarra were often persecuted, they created a secret hierarchical organization with an Imām as its head (Corbin 1993: 221-225).

Ibn Bājja was born in Saragossa, but in 1118 it was invaded by Alfonso I of Aragon so he fled to the south. Later he moved to Morocco; at the court of Fez, he became *Wazīr* until he was poisoned by envious political rivals in 1138. His most famous work is *Tadbīr al-Mutawwahhid* (Regime of the Solitary), in which he followed the footsteps of al-Fārābī in search of an ideal political regime. For Ibn Bājja, the philosopher must become a solitary or a stranger, terms typical of ancient Gnosis, in order to actualize his inner reflection. In this unique state, there is neither disease nor crime, because the solitaries have achieved physical and moral perfection. They are dedicated entirely to a life of wisdom and virtue. These solitaries follow a regime of actions leading to the conjunction with the Active Intellect.

The philosopher has two choices either to immigrate to the virtuous city or if such a city does not exist to live like a stranger (*gharīb*) in a corrupted regime where the majority of people live like beasts fulfilling various types of desire or impulse. Man has the capacity to rise above the beasts to perform voluntary actions in agreement with his human intellect. The ultimate way to achieve spiritual happiness is to enter in conjunction with the Active Intellect who occupies an intermediary position between God and the physical world. There are two kinds of intelligible forms: those which must be abstracted from matter and the others which are totally separated from matter. The possible intellect of man possesses the first kind of intelligible forms only *in potentia* and with the help of the Active Intellect they are brought *in actu* and perceived in their universality. The objective of the solitary is to perceive the forms as completely detached from matter.

Ibn Tufayl (d. 581/1185) was born in Cadiz in the province of Granada. He worked as secretary under the governor of Granada, and later he served as *Wazīr* and doctor for the Almohad sovereign Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf (1163-1184). The only philosophical work of Ibn Tufayl to have reached us is entitled *Hayy Ibn Yaqzān* inspired by Avicenna who wrote a recital of the same name in which he unveiled the premises of

his Oriental Wisdom. For Ibn Tufayl, the Oriental Wisdom is to be identified with Sufism. On a desert island lived a solitary, called Hayy, who was able to attain full spiritual maturity without any human teacher. Hayy was born on this island probably abandoned by his parents. The infant was adopted and nourished by a gazelle. When the gazelle died, Hayy was depressed. Through an autopsy, he discovered that an heart failure was the cause of the death. From his own observations, Hayy deduced that the death occurs when the soul leaves the body. Gradually his observations on the hierarchy of plants and animals led him to the spiritual world. This creation must necessarily have a Creator. The beauty and order of the creation reveals a perfect, good and all-knowing God. Through the knowledge of his soul, Hayy arrives at the spiritual knowledge of the Necessary Being. He believes that happiness can be reached in the contemplation of God. The human being has three facets to his nature: animal, intellectual, and spiritual. He can satisfy his animal nature by fulfilling his basic needs. His intellectual nature, similar to heavenly bodies, becomes accomplished through his reflection on the beauty and order of the creation. His spiritual nature, akin to the Necessary Being, must seek the ultimate felicity which is complete extinction in God (*fanā' fī Allāh*) or realizing that nothing exists except God.

In the neighboring island live two young men Absāl and Salāmān in a populated society adhering to a religious credo. Avicenna wrote a recital of Salāmān and Absāl where the first symbolizes yourself while the second character represents the stage you have reached in mystical gnosis. For the Shī'ī thinker Nasīr al-dīn Tūsī, these two characters symbolized the two facets of the soul: the practical intellect (Salāmān) and the contemplative intellect (Absāl). In the Recital of Ibn Tufayl, Absāl is more idealistic while Salāmān is more practical. Absāl gives more importance to the inward meaning of religious truth while Salāmān is more attached to the literal truth. Salāmān ascends the social hierarchy and ends up governing the people. Absāl, who is a contemplative mystic, cannot adapt himself to this society so he decides to exile to the other island, which he thinks is uninhabited. Absāl meets Hayy who learns his language. As Hayy reveals to him his knowledge of the material and spiritual world, Absāl is truly impressed and began to understand that all that was taught to him about religion, through various sensory symbols, is already known to Hayy in a purer form. When Hayy learns that the common

people on the other island are veiled from the truth, he wants to visit them in order to reveal the whole truth. Hence Hayy and Absāl go to the other island. At first they are received with great honor, but as they unveil their knowledge the people become hostile because they are incapable to grasp it. Only the philosophers, a privileged few, can get access to the inner truths through philosophical discourse or mystical enlightenment while the masses are excluded and must cling to the letter of the religious law without questioning it. For Ibn Tufayl, the conflict between philosophy and religion is only superficial and apparent, because the truth has two sides internal and external as a coin. Only the philosophers can understand properly these sides which are really the same.

Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), better known as Averroes in the West, is a great rationalist and philosopher of Islam. He is considered as the greatest Muslim commentator of and exponent of Aristotelian philosophy. His major philosophical work is the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence) which was written in refutation of al-Ghazzālī's work, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (The Incoherence of Islamic Philosophers). He did not uniquely try to protect Avicenna but he was defending his own philosophical view more directly inspired by Aristotle. The philosophical writings of Averroes stirred up critical reactions throughout the Sunnī world. Averroes philosophical writings were more appreciate in Christian Europe.

This philosophy, coming from the Greeks, was considered to be irreligious by Sunnī orthodox Muslims. Being a rational philosopher, his ideas were incompatible with orthodoxy. Many Muslim Neo-Platonists and Pythagoreans affirm this principle from the One only One (the First Intellect) can emerge which Ibn Rushd rejects. His God move the world by his *Amr* (Command) while remaining unmoved like the Prime Mover of Aristotle. According to Ibn Rushd, man can attain perfection by entering in conjunction with the Active intellect. One can improve through study, speculation and negation of sensual desires.

For al-Ghazzālī, the differences between Islam and philosophy are irreconcilable. On the contrary, Ibn Rushd thinks that they are reconcilable. In the *Fasl al-maqāl* (The Decisive Treatise), he argues that only the philosophers can interpret accurately the Qur'ān because they alone can discover the Truth through sound demonstration (*burhān*) unlike the theologians whose arguments are based only on dialectic (*jadal*). The

philosophers should keep the true Qur'ānic interpretation for themselves and not reveal it to the theologians and the common people who are unable to grasp the whole Truth.

The greatest exponent of mysticism in the East, al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191), was born in 1155 in Suhraward in the north-west of Iran. He studied in Marāgha in Azerbaijan and later on in Isfahān in central Iran. He lived in south-eastern Anatolia where he was appreciated by the Saljūq prince of Rūm. Then he spent the rest of his life in Syria where he was persecuted by the doctors of law under Salāh al-dīn. He was finally executed in 587/1191 in Aleppo.

In his main work *Kitāb Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, he further pursued the project of Oriental Philosophy first elaborated by Avicenna, resurrecting the wisdom of ancient Persia going back to Hermes, Plato and Zarathustra (Zoroaster). According to al-Suhrawardī, Avicenna was unable to bring to its fulfillment the project of Oriental Philosophy because he was ignorant of its Oriental source (*al-asl al-mashriqī*) going back to the Sages of ancient Persia. It is their theosophy or Divine Wisdom of light that al-Suhrawardī intended to present in his book of Oriental Theosophy (*Kitāb Hikmat al-Ishrāq*). Therefore he became known as the head of the Oriental school, resurrecting the theosophy of the Persian Sages who were Platonists.

The starting point of al-Suhrawardī's theosophy is the concept of the *Xvarnah* the Light of Glory (*Khurrah* in Persian) inspired from Zoroastrianism. The concept of *ishrāq* (splendor or illumination of the sun when it rises) is the source of the theosophy which by its illumination becomes an act of awareness of being. This theosophy gives birth to an inner mystical vision, a knowledge which originates from the Orient of pure Intellects and unites philosophy and Sufism. From the Light of Glory (*Xvarnah*), the Light of Lights (*Nūr al-Anwār*) the First Lover proceeds Bahman (the First Zoroastrian Archangel) the First Beloved. This relationship of love is imitated at all levels in the procession of being. From the Light of Lights and the First Emanated Light (Bahman) proceeds eternally the longitudinal order (*tabaqat al-tūl*) the supreme Principles (*Usūl A'la'ūn*) or world of cherubic Intellects or Mothers (*Ummahāt*) who are the causes of each other. The positive dimensions of the longitudinal order create a latitudinal order (*tabaqat al-'ard*) of Intellect-Archetypes who are equal amongst themselves. Among them, you may find Gabriel and some Zoroastrian Archangels. The negative dimensions

of the longitudinal order bring into being the Heaven of the Fixed Stars. From this second order of Archangels emanates the Angel-Souls or Ispahbad Lights (Ispahbad meaning commander of an army) through which the Intellect-Archetypes rule over the species. Al-Suhrawardī's view of the world differs substantially from the traditional view of Islamic philosophers going back to al-Fārābī and Avicenna. Instead of the Moon's orb, the Heaven of the Fixed Stars becomes the boundary between the angelic worlds of Lights and the *barzakh* defined as everything that is body and in darkness.

The universe of al-Suhrawardī is composed of four parts: 1) The *jabarūt* is the world of cherubic Intellects and Intellect-Archetypes. 2) The *malakūt* is the world of Lights who rule over a body. 3) The *mulk* is composed of a double *barzarkh* of the celestial spheres and sublunary elements. 4) The *mundus imaginalis* (*ʿālam al-mithāl*), an intermediary world between the intelligible world and the physical world is composed of Forms and Images different from the pure Platonic Ideas. It is in the realm of the *mundus imaginalis* that the spiritual exegesis (*ta'wīl*), which leads back the symbols and allegories of the Qur'ān to their spiritual truths, is realized. For al-Suhrawardī the conflict between religion and philosophy is resolved in this intermediary world which was rejected by Averroes. At the summit of the spiritual hierarchy of Sages is a man who excels in philosophy as well as in spiritual experience. As in Shīʿism, such a man is the Pole (*Qutb*) around whom the world revolves and depends for its existence. The supreme Imām (Guide) is the "Pole of poles" (Corbin 1993: 214, 217).

The XIIIth century, even though politically overshadowed by the invasion of the Mongols and the end of the ʿAbbāsid caliphate, was also the Golden Age of Sufism. Known as *Shaykh al-Akbar* (the Greatest Shaykh), Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) was one of the most famous representatives of esoteric mysticism at that time. He was born in Murcia (city in Spain) in 1165 and at the age of eight he began his formal education and his parents moved to Seville. His work is complex, but it has an important philosophical aspect. He was one of the most prolific Sufis; 239 works are attributed to him. Many ideas inspired from Shīʿism and Ismāʿīlism are discernible in his works. Ibn al-ʿArabī was also inspired by al-Suhrawardī. One of its essential characteristics is that it makes philosophy and mystical experience inseparable. The disciples of al-Suhrawardī are

designated as "Platonists" (*Ashāb Aflatūn*); Ibn al-ʿArabī was similarly surnamed "Son of Plato" (Ibn Aflatūn).

For Ibn al-ʿArabī, the world is actually threefold: i) at the highest level, there is the universe of Intellects which can be apprehended by pure intellectual perception, ii) at an intermediary level is the universe of Angel-Souls who move the celestial spheres and govern the world of active Imagination (*Khayāl*) or Idea-Images, the place of theophanic visions which can be perceived by active Imagination, and iii) at the lowest level is the physical universe perceptible to the senses. Ibn al-ʿArabī created a comprehensive theosophical system that explains the relation of God and the world, in which the notion of "Unity of Being" (*Wahdat al-Wujūd*) becomes the central theme. According to him, all existence is one, a manifestation of the underlying Divine Reality. God is both transcendent and immanent. The Divine Essence is unknowable, whereas His Unity manifests itself in plurality. In his Unity reside the qualities of all potential beings. For Ibn al-ʿArabī, the only true existence belongs to the One, and it is that One which is visible in all manifestations. "Things" have no existence in themselves except as places of manifestation (*mazhar*) or reflections of primordial Unity.

Ibn al-ʿArabī explains the creation of the world by the fact that God wanted to escape from isolation. This idea is inspired from the famous *hadīth qudsī* (holy tradition or saying attributed to God): "I (Allāh) was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known, so I created the creation in order that I might be known." Creation is thus the manifestation of the One in the plurality of all creatures. As an entity, God is absolutely undifferentiated and unknowable. He is in a *'ama' mutlaq* (cloud, absolute fog), the invisible one of invisibilities (*ghayb al-ghuyūb*). To create the world, God chooses the First Intellect and illuminates him with a science of the Divine Names to which all that will be must conform. The Intellect transmits this science to the universal Soul who receives the science of nature. Then God gives existence to pure darkness (*al-zulma al-mahda*), in which He wants to appear through the negation of each negation of His Being. Simultaneously, a multiplicity of creatures emerges, each one being a particular witness to God, and attesting to the positive status of a Divine Name. Man is composed of matter and form. God, by means of an epiphanic radiation (*tajallī*) illuminates man and the light which is reflected off of him becomes his angel. The reflected light reveals the meaning

of man's being, his value as an "Image of God". The journey (*safar*) towards God starts when man discovers the angel who illuminates his path.

For Ibn al-ʿArabī, the goal of life is to acquire the wisdom through which the Sufi discovers the One hidden in the plurality of all beings. Our capacity to know God is in proportion to the Names which are revealed in us. God manifests Himself to each of us in the form of what we love; the form of our love is the form of the faith we profess. Only the Prophet, who is at the spiritual level of the First Intellect, deserves the name ʿAbd Allāh (Servant of God) because he encompasses all Names.

Prophet Muhammad plays a major role in the Divine quest; he is the Universal Man, the Perfect Human Being, the total theophany of Divine Names, the prototype of creation. Muhammad is the *Logos* "Divine Word," whose light was manifested in a particular aspect in each of preceding Prophets (Abraham, Moses, Jesus). Muhammad is the best example of the perfect spiritual realization. The Sufi has to pass through different stages until he becomes united with the Muhammadan Reality (*Haqīqa Muhammadiyya*). The notion of union does not mean becoming one with God, but the mystic must realize the already existing fact that he is one with God since God is Immanent. "Although identity is desirable, it is, in a real sense, impossible, because *wujūd* [being] belongs to God alone" (Chittick, 57). The One manifests most perfectly in *Al-Insān al-Kāmil*, the Perfect Human Being. He appears in every generation and becomes the mediator through whom the process of emanation and return occurs. The Perfect Human Being is the *Qutb* (Pole), the axis around which the universe revolves.

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What do Medieval Jewish and Christian philosophies owe to the Muslims? The answer to this question lies outside the scope of this chapter. Under Muslim rule in Spain, the Jewish philosophy reached its Golden Age. The Christians came to know Aristotle more thoroughly than they had hitherto known him, because of Muslims' works even though later on all his writings were translated directly from the Greek into Latin. In the XIIth century, when the influence of the Arabs was predominant, Christian theology exhibited a Neo-Platonic, Augustinian character which was compatible with the

Pythagorean-Platonic tendency, in Muslim thought. Solomon ben Gabīrōl was, for Duns Scotus, an authority of prime importance. On the other hand, the great Dominicans, Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, who shaped the doctrine of the Church, adopted a modified Aristotelianism, inspired from al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Maimonides. Averroes had an even more profound influence in the middle of the XIIIth century, mainly criticized by Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas while being defended by Siger of Brabant (De Boer, 208-213).

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