



EDITED BY

JAY L.

**GARFIELD**

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**EDELGLASS**

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**WORLD**  
**PHILOSOPHY**

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

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**WORLD**  
**PHILOSOPHY**

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JAY L. GARFIELD AND  
WILLIAM EDELGLASS

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## CHAPTER 28

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# THE HELLENIZING PHILOSOPHERS

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ANDREY SMIRNOV

THE Islamic thinkers who introduced Greek philosophy and Hellenistic approaches to doing philosophy are referred to as the “Hellenizing Philosophers.” What did it mean “to Hellenize” in an Islamic cultural milieu? There is no single or uniform answer. The interplay of Islamic and Hellenistic ways of asking questions and constructing arguments to defend conclusions was varied. From some perspectives Greek and Islamic approaches to philosophy were complementary; in other respects there was a tension between two different ways of thinking.

The Hellenizing thinkers introduced Greek philosophy into a culture that already possessed a rich philosophical tradition. The great cities of that time (eighth to ninth centuries, Umayyad and early Abbasid period) were centers of intense polemics concerning the central questions of Islamic doctrine. The Mu‘tazilites, the first really influential Islamic school of rational thought, at their “meetings” (*majālis*) made the most substantial contribution to this process.<sup>1</sup> From the beginning, in the early eighth century, they adopted the rational principle of seeking a sufficient, reasonable ground for any statement they made, and not relying on the authority of Revelation. This led them to pursue investigation as far as they could in response to the problems they raised. They introduced basic ontological categories (*wujūd-‘adam-thubūt*, “existence-nonexistence-fixedness”) and discussed the ontological status of things. They had debates concerning divine attributes that focused on the problem of oneness and unity of God and theory of action, and defended the doctrine of human autonomous action and free will. The Mu‘tazilites also developed a sophisticated

1. See Ormsby’s chapter, *Islamic Theology*.



physics—including atomistic theories of time, space, and matter—and a rigorous ethics. In addition to philosophical inquiry, the Muʿtazilites contributed to almost every significant field of Islamic science of that time, including jurisprudence and philology. Thus, while it was only through Arabic translations from the Greek that the Islamic world gained access to logical theory, there was much philosophical activity in the Islamic world prior to the translations of Greek philosophy.

Why did Muslim scholars embrace Greek philosophy? There are two primary reasons. First, Greek philosophy was regarded as perfect, accomplished wisdom. This distinguished it favorably from the Muʿtazilite theoretical quest. The Muʿtazilites rarely agreed among themselves. It was the questions, and not the answers, that they had in common, and even the core of their doctrine—the “five principles” (*al-uṣūl al-khamsa*)—were a subject of constant reinterpretation. Greek philosophy, viewed from an Islamic perspective, was completely different in that respect. It was an epitome of wisdom (*ḥikma*), which is “knowledge” (*ʿilm*) with the highest degree of “certitude” (*yaqīn*). Certain knowledge rules out debate, they believed, for it provides answers that are not subject to change. So, wisdom is not only perfect, but is also one; and it is one because it is perfect. When al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) wrote *Al-Jamʿ bayna Raʾyay al-Ḥakīmayn* (*The Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages*), his main concern was to prove that Plato and Aristotle may have disagreed in their “wording” (*alfāz*) but they were in agreement in their “meaning” (*maʿānī*). The arguments of his adversaries that he seeks to refute, though, are so numerous that it makes clear that his contemporary Islamic intellectuals recognized the differences between Plato and Aristotle. Later, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl (“The Assassinated,” d. 587/1191), the founder of the Ishrāqiyya school, declared that all the preceding philosophers and prophets, from Zoroaster and up to Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), proclaimed one and only one wisdom. This testifies to the deep-rootedness of the Islamic version of the *philosophia perennis*—that all great sages share the same wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

The second reason Greek philosophy flourished in Muslim lands was the closing of the foremost schools of Greek learning under Roman emperors in the fifth and sixth centuries—for example, the Edessa School was closed by Zenon in 489 and the Athenian Academy by Justinian in 529. The teachers and students from these institutions were hosted by Persia where they resumed their activities. As a result, Greek learning was concentrated for the next several centuries in Iran and Central Asia. By the time of the Islamic conquests, Greek philosophy had been discussed and commented on by generations of non-Greek scholars. Numerous textbooks on Peripatetic philosophy and Aristotelian logic circulated in various languages, including Syriac, Persian, and Greek. Perhaps because of their own significant intellectual experience, scholars in the Muslim world were able to appreciate the accomplishments of the “ancients” (*qudamāʾ*) in philosophy, astronomy,

2. Ironically, al-Suhrawardī himself coins a new philosophical terminology and elaborates an original philosophy in his *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (*Wisdom of Illumination*), rejecting *falāsifa* (Hellenizing philosophers) and yet proclaiming adherence to the eternal philosophical wisdom.

and medicine. As al-Kindī (d. 256/870) writes in a letter to caliph al-Mu'taṣim: wisdom is wisdom regardless of its origins; it is not tainted by the fact that non-Muslims were the first to develop it and Muslims should not be ashamed of adopting it. This sentiment manifests the value with which knowledge (*'ilm*) and its instrument, reason (*'aql*), are held in Islamic culture. Indeed, it is consistent with a well-known tradition according to which the Prophet urges believers to seek knowledge anywhere, even in the farthest lands of "China," thus transgressing cultural and religious borders. With the arrival of Greek knowledge—especially medicine, the sciences, and philosophy—in their own lands, the Islamic state sanctioned its appropriation and adaption to Islamic culture.

## TRANSMISSION

The process of translation of Greek knowledge to Arabic was a long and painstaking one. Initially proceeding through the individual efforts of translators, the project was later sponsored by the caliph himself, when the famous *Bayt al-Ḥikma* (*House of Wisdom*) was established by al-Ma'mūn (d. 218/833). Translations into Arabic were made via Syriac or directly from Greek. At the beginning the focus was on Aristotle's logical texts. The first translations were made mainly by non-Arabs and/or non-Muslims, and were difficult to read; almost none of these survived. After several decades much more intelligible translations were produced, and Aristotelian logic started its triumphant march through Islamic philosophy and thought. The problem with the translations was not simply semantic; it also had to do with patterns of thought. Arabic language does possess means of expressing contradictions, but it uses them rarely. The negative particle *lā* may be used with any noun, but this way of constructing dichotomous sets of categories sounds unnatural in Arabic. This somewhat awkward and artificial style is still there in al-Kindī's writings, though it fades away in later authors' works.

Aristotle was the most important of Greek thinkers who found their way into Islamic philosophy. With one important exception, Muslim thinkers possessed a reliable Aristotelian corpus, including far more than the works on logic. That exception is the so-called Theology of Aristotle. Attributed to Aristotle, it is in fact a paraphrase of the last three books of Plotinus's *Enneads*. In addition to the works of Aristotle, Plato's dialogues (*Laws*, *Sophist*, *Timaeus*, and others) were circulating in Arabic. Galen was also widely read. Alexander of Aphrodisias' commentaries and Porphyry's *Isagoge* were studied as well. Neopythagorean and Stoic influences are also apparent in Islamic thought, though the textual sources are more difficult to locate.

This legacy of Greek thought was transmitted through professional translations and commentaries, aimed at a relatively narrow circle of scholars. At the same time, numerous encyclopedias and books of *adab* (moralizing instructions furnished in a refined literary style) helped disseminate Greek knowledge among the educated

public. (The scope of learning and intellectual culture in Islamic lands during the classical period was much higher than in Europe.) Thus, Greek knowledge gradually became an important, and contested, part of the Islamic intellectual curriculum.

## METAPHYSICS, COSMOLOGY, AND PHYSICS

Aristotelianism, Neoplatonism, and Platonism, in addition to less prominent sources, made up an amalgam of what was thought to be a unified wisdom. Teachings of these different schools of thought were used in a way pieces of a puzzle are added one to another to build up a harmonious picture. Where Aristotelianism offered no confident answer, Neoplatonic doctrine was brought into play, disguised as a Peripatetic teaching in the *Theology of Aristotle*. Platonism was the least influential of the three. Most important, it was a resource for theories of the human soul and its faculties, ethical teachings, and al-Fārābī's utopia. However, in psychology and ethics Platonism was competing with the more dominant Aristotelianism. Plato's theory of forms was adopted as a sort of visionary mystical mythology rather than philosophy; idealism more generally has not flourished in Islamic thought.

As a rough scheme, the doctrine resulting out of the careful adjustment of heterogeneous teachings was built along the following lines:

The First (the First Principle, the First Thing) is the One. It is perfect unity and absolute perfection. It is simple and nothing precedes it in the order of being. Its simplicity implies that its self (*dhāt*) is identical with its being. Its being is necessary (*wājib*), which means that it had never been nonexistent and can never become nonexistent. This amounts to saying that the First is eternal (*qadīm*).

The "First Thing" is a philosophical name for what religious doctrine calls "God." The "thing" (*shay*) was understood since the days of the Mu'tazilites as a synonym of "fixed" or "established" (*thābit*), and this understanding prevailed regardless of a dispute over the question whether "fixedness" (*thubūt*) is identical with "being" (*wujūd*) or indicates a distinct ontological state. Since God is certainly "established," "the Thing" can denote Divinity. This identity entitled philosophers to claim the "real," "true" (*ḥaqīqī*) understanding of what religion knew only "metaphorically" (*majāzī*). Given the general Islamic quest for "certitude" (*yaqīn*), it implied that religion is inferior to philosophy; this implication was elaborated by Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198) in his *Faṣl al-Maqāl* ("Decisive Statement").

In relation to all other things, the First Thing is the First Cause. Itself not caused by anything, the First Cause is the cause of everything, for all the intermediate causes are endowed with causal power derived from the First Cause. This marks an ontological distinction between the First Cause and the rest of the Universe: while the First is eternal and necessary, all the other things are contingent, shifting between nonexistence and existence. This is why our world is called the world of "origination and destruction" (*kawn wa fasād*).

As an absolute perfection, the First Thing is the source from which all other things emanate. The emanation of being (*fayḍ al-wujūd*) takes place not “because” of anything, since the First has no cause, and not “for the sake of” anything, since the absolutely perfect First is deprived of nothing and has no deficiency in itself. Thus, no will is involved in the emanation.

The emanation results in the hierarchy of being, from the perfect to the most contemptible. It is at the same time a hierarchy of unity and multiplicity; of general, particular, and individual; and of good and evil.

The emanation first produces cosmic intellects, from the first to the tenth. They correspond to the ten celestial concentric spheres. The lowest seven of those are occupied by the seven “heavenly bodies,” with the Sun in the center and the Moon in the lowest sphere. Above those is the sphere of “fixed stars,” after which another two spheres are added so that the whole number is ten. The intellect occupying the sphere of the Moon is the Active Intellect. It is a depository of all the forms to be found in the sublunary world.

The sublunary world consists of four concentric spheres of the four elements: fire, air, water, and earth. The sphere of the earth is the planet we live on, situated in the center of the universe and by Divine wisdom and care deprived of strictly spherical figure. The mountains and plateaus are projected into the air from under the water high above their natural locus. This is what makes life on earth possible.

Each of the four elements possesses a pair of qualities, being either dry or humid, and either hot or cold. The reason for this variety is the effect of the celestial spheres’ rotation and the heat this movement causes, for it gradually fades away as we move from the lunar sphere, under which the dry and hot fire is situated, toward the center where earth, the cold and dry element, is located.

Mixing of the four elements on the earth’s surface accounts for the variety of earthly beings. There are three basic classes: minerals (*jamād*), plants (*nabāt*), and animals (*ḥayawān*), according to the three principal grades of the mixture’s balanced subtlety (*i’tidāl*). The more balanced and subtle the mixture is, the more it is ready to accept the soul and life donated from above and flowing through the universe. Minerals are deprived of soul. Plants possess vegetable soul with its faculty of growth. Animals, in addition to the vegetable soul, possess animal soul with its aggression and strive for pleasure. Those faculties are needed to repel enemies and reproduce. Human beings possess rational (*nāṭiq*) soul as well.

Beings in the sublunary world are corporeal. They are constituted by matter and form. The physical body by definition possesses three spatial dimensions. In theory, any body can be divided infinitely; in actuality, however, there always exists a limit to that division. Thus, no atoms exist, and Mu’tazilites’ atomistic theories of matter were discarded as incompatible with Aristotelian continuity. Inferior spatial dimensions are limits of the superior, not their elements; thus, a line is a limit of a plane, constituted by the intersection of two nonparallel planes, but does not “consist of” dots and is not constructed by adding one dot to another. The Mu’tazilites argued for almost the opposite and thought that a juxtaposition (not addition) of

two dots would produce a line, and so on; in Aristotelian perspective this argument was considered erroneous as well. Finally, the present is the limit between past and future, and time, being a measure of eternal celestial movement, is continuous and cannot be divided into basic atomic elements. Thus, the third of Mu'tazilites' atomistic theories is rejected.

Physical bodies "move," which means they can "act," which in turn runs contrary to the Mu'tazilites' view. Their sophisticated theories of movement "originating" (*mutawallid*) in physical bodies—which are only "metaphorical" (*majāzī*), and cannot be "real" (*ḥaqīqī*) actors, for they have no will, while "willing" (*irāda*), according to the Mu'tazilites, is essential for action—through a "real" agent (i.e., human being), are no longer needed to explain physical movement. It emerges naturally when an element is displaced and leaves its natural locus, and by that natural movement it returns to where it belongs; in all other cases the movement is coercive and requires application of a force.

Obvious examples testified to the validity of Aristotelian physics. The light of a candle always points upward, toward the natural locus of fire. Air encapsulated in a goatskin would not go under water unless forced to do so; it would naturally move upward and pops up from under the water when released because its natural locus is above water. The application of this theory was vivid and convincing, and the theory itself simple and elegant. Contrasted with Mu'tazilites' physics, which operated with notions not related directly to anything perceptible by the senses, Muslim scholars opted for the theory of less complexity and greater demonstrative force.

Everything in the sublunary world has four causes, namely, its matter, its form, the agent who produced it, and the goal for which the actor acted. Only when all four (*materialis, formalis, efficiens, finalis*) come together and any obstacle for their effectiveness is absent do they produce their fruit, bringing their effect into existence. In the world of generation and corruption, this process goes on endlessly without beginning. Thus, the world as a whole is eternal, though everything in it comes into existence and perishes.

## ..... EPISTEMOLOGY .....

According to the Islamic thinkers who appropriated Greek philosophy, the soul is the perfection of the body. The human soul has the faculty to detach forms from matter and operate with them; this faculty distinguishes it from all other beings endowed with soul. Two ways lead to the acquisition of forms. First, they are to be found in the world, in the beings around us. This is a way of exploration, of learning by experience. Second, they all are to be found in the Active Intellect, the intellect of the lunar sphere. If we access it, we acquire the forms immediately from their source and not by detaching them from matter. This is a way of gaining immediate

knowledge. This general scheme is the basis for the interplay of two epistemological strategies, that of logical and of intuitive (not mystical) cognition, which we find in the Hellenizing philosophers' writings.

The former way, the way of exploration, is paved by logic, the instrument for operating with abstract forms. First, correct notions need to be constructed; second, they need to be organized correctly so that they produce "certain" (*yaqīnī*) knowledge. Correct notions are formed by definitions through *genus* and *differentia*, and later used in syllogisms. Aristotelian logic was catechized and popularized through innumerable treatises (this activity is associated mainly with al-Fārābī), and was valorized as an instrument.

Islamic authors, however, did not fail to point out its deficiencies. First, it requires tools to be applied in order to produce its fruit. Whenever the use of a tool is involved, there is always a threat of mistake: a notion might be formed erroneously, and a syllogism might be faulty. Thus, logic does not guarantee against errors. Second, the object of logical cognition is that which may be captured by correct notions, which means it should have a genus. This is not a problem for most things, yet it does not hold for the First Thing, which is the First Cause. However, we do not know anything truly unless we know the First Cause, which is the ultimate cause of everything; and knowing the First Cause, we know all the other things. So, what about the instrument of cognition that fails to grasp the First Cause? The argument for existence of a genus composed of only one individual, which some philosophers advanced, was too weak to close the gap.

As for the latter way, the way of intuition, it is devoid of both of these flaws. Being an immediate cognition, it uses no tool. When Ibn Sīnā started to develop his theory of intuition (*ḥads*), he pointed to human ego (*anā, anā'iyya*) and Divinity as two of its "objects," and later the Ishrāqiyya school declared everything to be cognizable intuitively through "illuminating conjugation" (*iḍāfa ishrāqiyya*). These advantages are balanced, though, by the difficulty of practicing intuitive cognition. While logic is accessible by anyone with enough intelligence and capacity to memorize its rules, there is no way to teach intuitive cognition. It is a gift rather than a fruit of goal-oriented action, though some propedeutic steps leading to it (like physical asceticism and moral piety) were considered helpful. The dialectic of the two ways of cognition was dwelt upon metaphorically by Ibn Sīnā in *Ḥayy Ibn Yaḳzān* (*The Living, Son of the Awake*) and later by al-Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl in *al-Ghurba al-Gharbiyya* (*The Western Outland*), and elaborated in detail by Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 501/1185) in his famous *Ḥayy Ibn Yaḳzān*.

## ETHICS AND AESTHETICS

According to the Hellenizing philosophers, the hierarchy of unity and multiplicity, paralleled by the hierarchy of general and particular, sets up the coordinates of human perfection, be it individual or collective. The way to individual perfection is

twofold, as the way of cognition is. First, it is a path for acquiring virtues and expurgating vices. Aristotelian ethics explains how to do that: first, we have to realize that every virtue is a middle between the two extremes, which are vices; and second, we have to purify ourselves in accordance with that knowledge and practice virtues, not vices. Authors such as Yaḥyā Ibn ‘Adī (d. 974) and Miskawayh (d. 1030; *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq, Arrangement of Characters*, and *Risāla fī māhiyyat al-‘adl, Treatise on the Quiddity of Justice*) gave rise to a whole tradition of treatises on virtues and vices, to be followed by giants like Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274). This way of knowledge and practice is focused on the world we live in, with its causes and effects; in this respect it is similar to the epistemological strategy of exploration.

Second, there is a path to individual perfection focused on the supreme cause, which is elevated above all the other causes and does not belong to this world. This supreme cause is sometimes identified with the Active Intellect of the lunar sphere, for it “administers” (*tadbīr*) the affairs of our world being the source of all forms. As philosophers shifted from an Aristotelian to a Neoplatonic perspective (which for them, though, was still understood to be Aristotelian), the supreme cause was identified with the First Cause. Only the soul, not the body, is capable of reuniting with the First Unity; therefore, our goal is to train it so that it can exercise its independence from the body, and even leave it before physical death, returning to it after some time. This is a way of mystical unity with the Divine, disguised as philosophy.

A way to collective human perfection is described in the famous *Ārā’ Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila (Views of the Virtuous City’s Inhabitants)* by al-Fārābī. He constructs his “virtuous city” as a paraphrase of Plato’s utopia. By their nature human beings need “community” (*ijtimā’*), since, if left to face the world alone, they perish because they are unable to attend to their needs. The city is the least possible level of human community, and it needs to be organized according to strict rules; it is an artificial construction, and never a natural phenomenon. The virtuous city is the one in which knowledge is matched by action, and both are perfect. Perfection of knowledge is provided for by adoption of philosophical wisdom; perfection of action is achieved through the proper hierarchical organization of society. The more general the science practiced in this or that profession, the higher its level, and the highest of all the sciences is the science of politics (*siyāsa*). Thus, there is only one type of virtuous city, while deviant, and therefore vicious, cities are many, depending on the degree to which knowledge and/or action are corrupted.

Greek aesthetics also influenced the Hellenizing philosophers, but to a lesser extent. In Islamic culture beauty and the beautiful relate not just to the perfection of form, but also to the perfection of correspondence between the “outward,” the “external” (*ẓāhir*), and the “inward,” the “internal” (*bāṭin*). This calls for particular means of artistic expression and accounts for the unique character of Islamic art throughout its various epochs and geographic diversity. Thus, while Muslim scholars did comment on Greek texts on aesthetics, especially Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Greek thought did not have a major influence on Islamic poetics. Despite various Islamic attempts to adopt Aristotelian aesthetic theory, the metaphorical repertoire of

Arabic poetry had to be described and analyzed in terms developed by Islamic theorists.

## ADOPTION BY ISLAMIC INTELLECTUAL MILIEU

The vast teachings of Greek thought were adopted and appropriated by Islamic culture in several ways. It is helpful to consider the Hellenizing philosophers from at least three perspectives: first, the overall perspective of Islamic intellectual culture; second, a perspective of *falsafa* (Arabicized Greek *philosophia*), or more specifically philosophers working with Greek, especially Aristotelian, approaches; and third, a perspective of Islamic philosophy in general.

In the first perspective, the impact of Hellenistic wisdom was felt in nearly every branch of knowledge. *Adab* literature of all kinds, being an assemblage of wise and instructive pieces of knowledge, by its very nature was apt to incorporate the philosophical legacy of Greek antiquity. While the Mu‘tazilites did not fall under the spell of Hellenistic philosophy, at its post-Mu‘tazilite stages *Kalām* gradually mixed, to some extent, with Greek thought. In striving to build up Islamic doctrine, the Ash‘arite *Kalām*, revising Mu‘tazilite philosophy and restricting its rational character, drew on Greek wisdom, with which it also sometimes came into tension.<sup>3</sup>

These tensions are addressed at length by al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (*Inconsistencies of the Philosophers*). The most critical points of tension are (1) the God of the *falāsifa* is deprived of will and the knowledge of individuals (it has only general, unchangeable knowledge), which means it does not decide the fate of human beings; (2) the world is eternal, and not created, which contradicts scripture; and (3) Islamic doctrine insists on corporeal resurrection of the dead, while *falāsifa* acknowledged spiritual resurrection and denied the corporeal one.

Summarizing the classical period of Islamic culture, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) says in his *Al-Muqaddima* (*Introduction*) that *falsafa* is widespread and taught everywhere in Islamic cities; however, one should be cautious and start learning it only after getting firmly established in Islamic doctrine and sciences. Otherwise, one’s mind would be led to where there is no certainty. At the same time, he defended the view that logic is the best tool known to humankind.

In *fiqh*, Islamic law and jurisprudence, a number of great figures, among them the celebrated al-Ghazālī, advocated the adoption of Aristotelian syllogistics in order to replace the *qiyās*—“measurement” of a new legal case by a standard of the known, or precedent—practiced by *fuqahā*’; these attempts, however, were in vain. *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* (*Brethren of Purity*, tenth century) relied on Greek wisdom in their epistles, which aimed at enlightening society. And, of course, the sciences of

3. See Ormsby’s chapter in this section.



medicine, astronomy, and mathematics were deeply influenced by and associated with Hellenistic philosophy.

The second perspective is shaped by *falsafa*; its representatives are called *falāsifa* (sing. *faylasūf*). This is a celebrated school of Hellenizing philosophers that flourished on Islamic soil. The pantheon of its most eminent adherents in the Eastern lands of Islam includes al-Kindī, “The Philosopher of the Arabs”; al-Fārābī, “The Second Teacher” (the first being Aristotle); and Ibn Sīnā, “The Head Master,” while in the West it is represented by Ibn Bājja (d. 533/1139), Ibn Ṭufayl, and Ibn Rushd, the great “Commentator” of Aristotle.

*Falāsifa* did their best to preserve, comment on, and transmit the wisdom of the Greeks. In accomplishing this task they were remarkably successful, though this was not their only achievement. As they addressed the important metaphysical and ethical questions of their time, they followed their own, non-Greek, original lines of thought. This accounts for two aspects of *falsafa*, one consistent with the Greeks, and the other more or less independent.

This second side was brought into play already by al-Kindī, in *Fī al-Falsafa al-Ūlā* (*On First Philosophy*) and other treatises where he speaks about “horizontal” causality. This is accounted for by the four Aristotelian causes, which explain how beings of this world produce one another. Yet there is another, “vertical” causality, running from anything of this world up to the First Cause through intermediate causes. This line of causality is more important in quite a definite way, for any “acting” (*fā‘iliyya*) cause would act only because it borrows its power of activity from the First Cause. To know the thing is to know its causes, al-Kindī says; and if we speak of “vertical” causality, we cannot know a thing unless we know the First Cause. It is the real and the true (*ḥaqīqī*) cause, while all the others are metaphorical (*majāzī*). This is the focal point of very different perspectives, that of Islamic doctrine with its central principle of *tawḥīd* (in one of its readings it means rendering all the causality to God); of Islamic ethical piety with its principle of “relying” (*tawakkul*) on God as the only real cause; and of Sufism with its striving to reach God as the only “basis” and “source” (*aṣl*) of being. When later Ibn Sīnā wrote in his *Al-Ishārāt wa al-tanbīhāt* (*Directives and Remarks*) that all the four causes boil down to the acting cause, he was following the same line of argument.

If the First Cause is the only Real Thing, what about all the other things? They are “possible” (*mumkin*), gaining their “necessity” (*wujūb*) from their cause, to which they get “attached” (*ta‘alluq*), and this line of borrowing the necessity is identical with the line of vertical causality. When the thing is detached from its cause, or its cause is unable to act, it becomes “impossible” (*mumtani*). Both necessity and impossibility are borrowed by the thing from “the other,” that is, its cause (and ultimately from the First Cause), while the thing as such, taken in itself, is “possible.” If necessity and impossibility are identified with being and nonbeing accordingly, possibility is the third ontological state, resembling what the Mu‘tazilites meant by “fixed” (*thābit*) thing. This ontology was developed by al-Fārābī (*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikma*, “Bezels of wisdom”; *Al-Ta‘līqāt*, “Comments”) and Ibn Sīnā and later severely criticized as non-Aristotelian by Ibn Rushd.

Philosophical exploration in Islamic culture was not limited to *falsafa*. Mu‘tazila, Ishrāqiyya, Ismā‘īliyya, and Šūfī schools of thought contributed to philosophy as well.<sup>4</sup> Only the Mu‘tazila were not influenced by the Greeks, while the others responded to Greek knowledge or utilized its teachings. After the general perspective of Islamic culture and the school of *falsafa*, this is the third way in which Hellenizing philosophy was present in Islamic culture.

Al-Suhrawardī, the founder of the Ishrāqiyya school, is indebted to Ibn Sīnā inasmuch as the latter developed the theory of intuition (*ḥads*) and ontology of the thing “as such,” regardless of its existence and nonexistence. However, al-Suhrawardī dismisses the teachings of *falāsifa* on the basis of his utmost nominalism (no general notion has any reality outside the mind) and sensualism (reality is basically simple and is perceptible only by senses). In the later elaboration of Ishrāqiyya by the “School of Isfahan” (Mīr Dāmād [d. 1041/1631], Šadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī [d. 1050/1640], and others), the lexicon of *falāsifa* was incorporated and their teachings mixed with early Ishrāqiyya doctrine.<sup>5</sup>

In Ismā‘īliyya philosophy, represented first and foremost by Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. beginning of eleventh century) with his *Rāḥat al-‘Aql* (*Peace of Mind*), Aristotelian teachings are used to explain all that goes on in the sublunary world, while the ontological status of God, sociology, and very interesting historiography were elaborated on a non-Aristotelian and mostly non-Hellenistic basis. In Šūfī philosophy, which culminated in the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), the lexicon of *falāsifa*, as well as the lexicon of nearly all preceding philosophical and nonphilosophical schools of thought, is used; however, the well-known categories of antiquity are reinterpreted in the light of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being) philosophy, which shapes, for Ibn ‘Arabī, the true perspective for interpreting *falsafa*.

## CONCLUSION

As a result of the encounter with Greek thought, Islamic culture appropriated and adopted Greek philosophical knowledge. Oddly, this came at the expense of Islam’s “homegrown” rationalist school of thought: Mu‘tazilite philosophy. The Mu‘tazila initiated and developed investigations in a number of the most important fields of philosophy, as well as philology and *fiqh*. These included philosophy of time and space, philosophy of language, and theories of action and ethics, to name only the most important ones. These theories were elaborated on a basis of rationality quite different from that of the Greeks.

Though *falsafa* was attacked by religious orthodoxy (*aqīda*), they both opposed followers of the Mu‘tazila school—each for its own reasons. As a result, unable to

4. See the other chapters on Islamic philosophy in this volume.

5. See Ziai’s chapter on Philosophy of Illumination.

face the double pressure of the overwhelming intellectual authority of the Greeks and dogmatic doctrinal religious authority, the Mu'tazilite influence waned and they were eventually forced out of the main intellectual centers of the Islamic world. The Ash'arite doctrinal dogmatic teaching replaced Mu'tazilite views as the dominant philosophical orientation. The Ash'arites preserved some central points of their earlier rivals, first and foremost their atomism; however, the search for the ultimate and unrestricted rational reasoning behind those theories was gone forever from *Kalām*. The opposite is true for *falsafa*. Rationalism was preserved, but the most creative and original findings of the Mu'tazilites were simply dropped and substituted by the adopted wisdom of the Greeks.

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