REFLECTIONS ON THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

As a result of secular dimension that the Western philosophy inclines to, many see philosophy as a phenomenon that cannot be attributed to religion, which led to hasty conclusion in some quarters that philosophy is against religion and must be seen and treated as such. This paper looks at the concept of philosophy in general and Islamic philosophy in particular. It starts by examining Muslim philosophers' understanding of philosophy, and the wider meanings it attained in their philosophical thought, which do not only reflect in their works but also manifest in their deeds and lifestyles. The paper also tackles the stereotypes about the so-called "replication of Greek philosophy in Islamic philosophy." It further unveils a total transformation and a more befitting outlook of Islamic philosophy accorded the whole enterprise of philosophy. It also exposes the distinctions between the Islamic philosophy and Western philosophy.

Keywords: Islam, Philosophy, Reason, Revelation

Introduction

From the onset of the growth of Islam as a religious and political movement, Muslim thinkers have sought to understand the theoretical aspects of their faith by using philosophical concepts. The discussion of the notion of meaning in Islamic philosophy is heavily influenced by theological and legal debates about the interpretation of Islam, and about who has the right to pronounce on interpretation. The introduction of

Greek philosophy into the Islamic world produced a new set of authorities on how to interpret texts, and this led to arguments over the potential benefits of the new approaches as compared to the traditional Islamic sciences. The discussion came to centre on the nature of ambiguity, equivocation and analogy, with different philosophers adopting diverse theories and thus attaining a variety of conclusions about how to interpret meanings. These variations have influential implications for the understanding of their thoughts. Not only do the different approaches result in different conclusions, they also represent different approaches to the whole philosophical enterprise. Like any other philosophical thought, Islamic philosophy went through stages before finally standing on its own. Regardless of reservations about philosophy from some quarters, Islamic philosophy may be seen as another method of making the message of Islam, the mission of Prophet Muhammad as well as the purpose of creation and the mission of mankind on this planet more understandable to the truth seekers by adopting philosophical methods to explain the mission and vision of Islam and its Prophet. This paper therefore, inter alia, attempts to allay the fear being entertained in some quarters that the whole essence of philosophy is alienation of religion and refutation of revelation. In other words, it shows that Islamic philosophy is a philosophy with a difference as practised by Muslim philosophers, which was to defend the sanctity of religion and infallibility of revelation.   Therefore, viewing the meaning of life through the lens of Islamic philosophy expands ones horizons beyond the present moment to reflect on the significance and purpose of human existence. The methodology adopted in the paper revolves around analysis of philosophers' views on general philosophy as well as Islamic philosophy with an appraisal where necessary for clarification.

The Concept of Philosophy

Scholars from generation to generation have made efforts to give what they think can best serve the purpose of putting to rest the nagging question; "what is philosophy?" In an attempt to get the problem solved, some definitions have compounded the problem, thus preventing a lay person away from understanding what philosophy is all about. Other explanations left some people confused and lost at the crossroads, as a result of technicalities brought to play in defining philosophy. We shall attempt to answer this question through philosophers' views on the concept of philosophy. Hegel (1770-1831),[1] sees philosophy as a means:

"to chart the development of Absolute Spirit from abstract, undifferentiated being into more and more concrete reality." Hegel believes this development occurs by a dialectical process, that is, a process through which conflicting ideas become resolved, which consists of a series of stages that occur in *triads* (sets of three). Each triad involves (1) an initial state (or thesis), which might be an idea or a movement; (2) its opposite state (or antithesis); and (3) a higher state, or synthesis, that combines elements from the two opposites into a new and superior arrangement. The synthesis then becomes the thesis of the next triad in an unending progress toward the ideal.[2] Hegel argues that this dialectical logic applies to all knowledge, including science and history. His discussion of history was particularly influential, especially because it supported the political and social philosophy later developed by Karl Marx.[3]

Curtis Brown surveys the difficulties in getting a precise definition of philosophy and states thus:

> Here is one reason why it is difficult to offer a short, pithy description of what philosophy is. In ancient Greece, the term "philosophy" was used extremely broadly. Consider, for instance, the writings of Aristotle (384 - 322 B.C.). These include not only all the topics we now think of as philosophical (for example logic, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, social and political philosophy, and aesthetics) but also a great many subjects that we would not now regard as part of philosophy (notably biology and physics). One, perhaps biased way to look at the history of philosophy is to see it as a history in which one scientific discipline after another branches off from philosophy, physics in the seventeenth century, biology in the nineteenth, psychology around the beginning of the twentieth, linguistics in the mid-twentieth century, and so on. Philosophy as we now understand it is roughly what is left of the collection of things Aristotle was interested in after the various sciences branch off![4]

The above assertion argues that other branches of knowledge and various disciplines may be seen as evolution of philosophy. To some extent, this may be so owing to the fact that one branch of knowledge is not independent of another.

In another attempt, Nagel Thomas looks at the term philosophy from the ancient Greeks' perspective and writes thus:

> As used originally by the ancient Greeks, the term philosophy
> meant the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Philosophy

comprised all areas of speculative thought and included the arts, sciences, and religion. As special methods and principles were developed in the various areas of knowledge, each area acquired its own philosophical aspect, giving rise to the philosophy of art, of science, and of religion. The term philosophy is often used popularly to mean a set of basic values and attitudes toward life, nature, and society thus the phrase "philosophy of life." Because the lines of distinction between the various areas of knowledge are flexible and subject to change, the definition of the term philosophy remains a subject of controversy.[5]

Similarly, philosophy is also defined as "the rational and critical inquiry into basic principles." It is often divided into four main branches: **metaphysics,** the investigation of ultimate reality; **epistemology,** the study of the origins, validity, and limits of knowledge; **ethics,** the study of the nature of morality and judgment; and **aesthetics,** the study of the nature of beauty in the fine arts.[6] On the other hand, another definition sees philosophy as an academic discipline concerned with making explicit the nature and significance of ordinary and scientific beliefs and investigating the intelligibility of concepts by means of rational arguments concerning their presuppositions, implications, and interrelationships; in particular, the rational investigation of the nature and structure of reality (metaphysics), the sources and limits of knowledge (epistemology), the principles and import of moral judgment (ethics), and the relationship between language and reality (semantics).[7] According to Khaja Khan, philosophy is a comprehensive word. With Western philosophers, it embraces the science of the world and of mind and the knowledge of God.[8] Looking at philosophy with modern academic realities, philosophy is said to be "an academic discipline that exercises reason and logic in an attempt to understand reality and answer fundamental questions about knowledge, life, morality and human nature."[9] In a related attempt, another definition maintains that "philosophy is a search for a general understanding of values and reality by chiefly speculative rather than observational means. It signifies a natural and necessary urge in human beings to know themselves and the world in which they live and move and have their being."[10]

A critical look at the above definitions suggests that virtually all of them emphasise quest for acquiring knowledge about everything to discover the real meaning of existence. They however left the onus of this discovery exclusively on the ability of man, while alienating and

underestimating the importance of divine guidance, and thus overestimating the capability of the human intellect.

The Concept of Islamic Philosophy

As various definitions arose as a result of attempts to define philosophy from the Western perspective, the same problem occurred in seeking a concise definition of Islamic philosophy. Nasr opines that in various attempts to arrive at an acceptable concept for Islamic philosophy, we must also take into consideration those Greek oriented definitions that have found their way into Islam sometimes with only minor amendments. He enumerated some of the definitions of Greek origin that are commonly used by Islamic philosophers as:

1. Philosophy *(al-falsafah)* is the knowledge of all existing things *qua* existents *(ashya' al-mawjudah bi ma hiya mawjudah).*
2. Philosophy is the knowledge of divine and human matters.
3. Philosophy is taking refuge in death, that is, love of death.
4. Philosophy is becoming God-like to the extent of human abi1ity.
5. It (philosophy) is the art *(sina'ah)* of arts and the science (*'ilm*) of sciences.
6. Philosophy is predilection for *hikmah*.[11]

After presenting these Western oriented definitions, a look at some foremost Islamic philosophers' definitions of philosophy from the Islamic perspective highlighting their acceptance or otherwise of the Western concepts of philosophy could also be of immeasurable benefits.

Muslim Philosophers' Concept of Philosophy
Al-Kindi (d. 873CE)

According to Nasr, the first of the Islamic philosophers, Abu Ya'qub al-Kindi, wrote in his *On First Philosophy* that "Philosophy is the knowledge of the reality of things within people's possibility, because the philosopher's end in theoretical knowledge is to gain truth and in practical knowledge to behave in accordance with truth".[12]

Ibn Sina (d. 1037CE)

Ibn Sina again accepts these earlier definitions while making certain precisions of his own. In his (*'Uyun al-hikmah*) he asserts that: "*Al-hikmah* (which he uses as being the same as philosophy) is the perfection of the human soul through conceptualisation (*tasawwur*) of things and

judgment (*tasdiq*) of theoretical and practical realities to the measure of human ability.[13] Ibn Sina however went further in later life to distinguish between Peripatetic philosophy and what he called "Oriental philosophy" (*al-hikmah al-mashriqiyyah*) which was not based on ratiocination alone but included realised knowledge, which set the stage for the *hikmah al-ishraq* of Suhrawardi.[14]

Bahmanyar (d. 1067CE)

Ibn Sina's foremost student, Bahmanyar, on his part identifies *falsafah* closely with the study of existents as Ibn Sina had done in his Peripatetic works, such as the *Shifa'*, repeating the Aristotelian dictum that philosophy is the study of existents *qua* existents. Bahmanyar wrote in the introduction to his *Tahsil,* "The aim of the philosophical sciences is knowledge of existents."[15]

Suhrawardi (d. 1191CE)

A Muslim philosopher who combined reasoning with spiritual well-being saw no reason why a philosopher should score zero on the spiritual platform. Nasr sees Suhrawardi's philosophical conviction as a milestone in the history of Islamic philosophy:

> With Suhrawardi we enter not only a new period but also another realm of Islamic philosophy. The founder of a new intellectual perspective in Islam, Suhrawardi used the term *hikmah al-ishraq* rather than *falsafah al-ishraq* for both the title of his philosophical masterpiece and the school which he inaugurated. The ardent student of Suhrawardi and the translator of *hikmah al-ishraq* into French, Henry Corbin (d. 1978), employed the term *theosophie* rather than philosophy to translate into French the term *hikmah as* understood by Suhrawardi and later sages such as Al-Shirazi (Mulla Sadra) (d. 1641CE), and we have also rendered *al-hikmat al-muta'aliyah* of Mulla Sadra into English as "transcendent theosophy" and have sympathy for Corbin's translation of the term.[16]

Nasr maintains that the term "theosophy" has gained recognition in European languages, especially English, thus exposing the limitation and inaccuracy of the term "philosophy" imposed by earlier philosophers. Going by Suhrawardi's definition and terminology, those whom Suhrawardi calls *hukama'* are not philosophers.[17] This terminology (theosophy) also unveils the limitation of the term "philosophy" generally

used in conveying the actual meaning of *hikmah* in the Arabic language. This discovery therefore separates the wheat from the chaff. Nasr writes:

> The narrowing of the meaning of philosophy, the divorce between philosophy and spiritual practice in the West and especially the reduction of philosophy to either rationalism or empiricism necessitate making a distinction between the meaning given to *hikmah* by Suhrawardi or Mulla Sadra and the purely mental activity called philosophy in certain circles in the West today.[18]

Mulla Sadra (d. 1641CE)

Though he agrees with some of the earlier concepts and definitions, he quotes them in the opening of his *Asfar* and also adds his own definition, thereby shifting the frontier of the term "philosophy" to another level. Nasr tries to drive home the outstanding efforts of Mulla Sadra in the following words:

> Mulla Sadra discusses extensively the various definitions of *hikmah*, emphasising not only theoretical knowledge and "becoming an intelligible world reflecting the objective intelligible word" but also detachment from passions and purification of the soul from its material defilements or what the Islamic philosophers call *tajarrud* or catharsis. Mulla Sadra accepts the meaning of *hikmah as* understood by Suhrawardi and then expands the meaning of *falsafah* to include the dimension of illumination and realisation implied by the *ishraqi* and also *Sufi* understanding of the term. For him as for his contemporaries, as well as most of his successors, *falsafah* or philosophy was seen as the supreme science of ultimately divine origin, derived from "the niche of prophecy" and the *Hukama' as* the most perfect of human beings standing in rank only below the prophets and Imams.[19]

Comparing the above attempts between definition of general philosophy and Islamic philosophy reveals that the two "camps" have some issues in common, such as knowledge, intellect and desire to discover the truth. On the other hand, Islamic philosophy emphasises reasoning with revelation and points out the limitation of human intellect to unilaterally discover the truth without the aid of revelation. In the same vein, when scrutinising the aforementioned definitions and concepts, one would realise that Islamic philosophy is a comprehensive philosophical system that does not only pay attention to knowledge and discovery of true nature of the things as they are, but also takes into consideration the

spiritual aspect of human life, thereby combining worldly affairs with the hereafter. This is commensurate with the Islamic teachings that the religion cares about this world and the next. This aspect of philosophical thought was greatly reflected in the lives and writings of Muslim philosophers. Nasr and Leaman expatiate on this when they write:

> This conception of philosophy as dealing with the discovering of the truth concerning the nature of things and combining mental knowledge with the purification and perfection of one's being has lasted to this day... the most eminent representatives of the Islamic philosophical tradition to this day... all wrote of the definition of philosophy along the lines mentioned above and lived accordingly. Both their works and their lives were testimony not only to over a millennium of concern by Islamic philosophers as to the meaning of the concept and the term philosophy but also to the significance of the Islamic definition of philosophy as that reality which transforms both the mind and the soul and which is ultimately never separated from spiritual purity and ultimately sanctity that the very term *hikmah* implies in the Islamic context.[20]

Aims and Objectives of Islamic Philosophy

Islamic philosophy is unique in the sort of topics and issues with which it deals, the sort of problems it attempts to solve and the methods it uses to solve them. Islamic philosophy concerns itself with such matters as the problem of unity and multiplicity and the relationship between God and the world, both of which had been subjects of heated controversies and discussions among the theologians for aeon. Another aim of this philosophy is to reconcile revelation with reason, knowledge with faith, and religion with philosophy, and to demonstrate that reason and revelation do not contradict each other if the reason is used within the realm of the Shariᶜah as explained by the Glorious Qur'an. "Do they not then consider the Qur'an carefully? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein many contradictions" (*an-Nisa'*, 82).

Although Islamic philosophy is religiously oriented, it has not ignored any major philosophical issues. For example, it has extensively discussed the problem of being, and defended its position on issues like time, space, matter, and life. Its treatment of epistemology is both unique and comprehensive. It drew distinction between the self (*nafs*) and reason, inborn and acquired qualities, accuracy and error, surmise and certain knowledge. It has investigated the question of what is virtue and happiness, and divides virtues into a number of categories and concludes

that the highest virtue is uninterrupted contemplation and serene realisation of the truth.[21]

Muslim thinkers divided philosophy into the two generally accepted categories of "speculative and practical". Their discussions extended over varied topics, such as natural philosophy, mathematics, metaphysics, ethics and politics.[22] Evidently, the Islamic thinkers believed that philosophy has a much greater scope than it is generally given today, and in this regard, their work was similar to that of the Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle, whom they imitated and followed. Thus, Islamic philosophy has intermingled with medicine, biology, chemistry, botany, astronomy and music. Generally speaking, all the fields of science were considered to be nothing other than branches of philosophy.[23]

Considering all that has been said above, it would not be an overstatement to assert that Islamic philosophy encompasses all the various aspects of Islamic culture. It should, of course, be kept in mind that during the ages when Islamic philosophy was developing and maturing, learning and investigation were carried out in an encyclopaedic and all-round manner, such that Muslim philosophers argued with non-Muslim philosophers using same methods used by them. However, those methods were used with Islamic intricacies to drive home their points.

Furthermore, the full range of Islamic philosophical thought cannot be fully accessible through the study of philosophical texts alone. In order to attain a full understanding, it is necessary to expand the range of investigation and research to include discussion of theology *(kalam)* and mysticism *(tasawwuf).* It might even be necessary to relate any discussion of Islamic philosophy to the history of Islamic Law and the principles of Jurisprudence, due to the fact that all these are interwoven. It is not rare to discover philosophical ideas, concepts, and views in what are ostensibly Islamic scientific texts dealing with such topics as medicine, geometry, chemistry, and astronomy. Besides, some Muslim scientists showed more courage and freedom in expressing philosophical views than that shown by those specialising in the field of philosophy.

Also, amongst Islamic mystical and theological discussions, views and positions are encountered which in their profundity and precision equal any found amongst the Aristotelians. These Muslim thinkers challenged Aristotle's philosophy and struggled against it for many years. This struggle led to the emergence of a distinctive Islamic philosophy and thought. Later on, a certain methodology and forms of rational analysis were introduced into discussions about the foundations of Islamic Law and

the principles of Jurisprudence, which have a distinctly perceptible philosophical tinge. It is even possible to uncover in their involved procedures, rules and methods similar to those in use nowadays.[24]

Nature of Islamic philosophy

According to Oliver Leaman, one of the interesting features of Islamic philosophy is that there is controversy as to what it actually is:

> Is it primarily the sort of philosophy produced by Muslims? This is unsatisfactory since many Muslims who work as philosophers do not deal with Islamic issues in their philosophical work. Similarly, there are many philosophers who are not Muslims and yet whose work is clearly in the area of Islamic philosophy. Could we call the Islamic philosophy, philosophy which is written in Arabic? Certainly not, since a great deal of Islamic philosophy perhaps the majority of it is written in other languages, in particular Persian. Is Islamic philosophy then the philosophy which examines the conceptual features of specifically Islamic issues? Not necessarily so, since there are many thinkers whose work on logic and grammar, for example, is part of Islamic philosophy, even though there is no direct religious relevance in their work. Some commentators have tried to develop a central agenda which everyone who can be called an Islamic philosopher must share; they then have the difficulty of fitting everything in Islamic philosophy into that framework, a task which ultimately tends to fail.[25]

Leaman then makes the following suggestions:

> Perhaps, the best way of specifying the nature of Islamic philosophy is to say that it is the tradition of philosophy which arose out of Islamic culture, with the latter term understood in its wider sense.[26]

Critical examination of Leaman's assertions above unveils two main issues on the nature of Islamic philosophy. First, Islamic philosophy deals with issues pertaining to Islam in particular and human phenomenon in general. Second, it does not discriminate on the capability and scholastic competence of an individual, provided such a person plays by the rule; that is, objectivity devoid of sentiments must be brought to play while dealing with Islamic philosophy.

Historicity of Islamic Philosophy

Another nagging question that requires a precise answer is: when did Islamic philosophy start? This is also a difficult question to answer, since from the early years of Islam, a whole variety of legal and theological problems arose, which are clearly philosophical, or at least, use philosophical arguments in their elucidation. For example, there were heated debates about the acceptability of anthropomorphic language to describe the deity, and about the roles of free will and determination in the lives of human beings.

Islamic philosophy, in its fullest sense began in the third century of the *hijrah.* The supremacy of the 'Abbasids over the Umayyads had led to an eastward movement of the Islamic empire, with the capital moving from Damascus to Baghdad. By this time also, Islam dominated such areas as Egypt, Syria and Persia, all places which were thoroughly immersed in Greek culture. The new rulers sought to apply the learning which existed in the empire to their own purposes. Much of this knowledge was very practical, being based on medicine, astrology, astronomy, mathematics and engineering. The Khalifah al-Ma'mun founded in Baghdad the *bayt al-hikmah* (the House of Wisdom), in 217AH/ 832CE, which served as an observatory and, more importantly, as a library and centre for the translation of Greek texts into Arabic. Many of the translators were Christians, who translated texts first from Greek into Syriac and then into Arabic.[27] In addition to the influence of the many translations of Greek texts, there was also an important transmission of Indian and Persian literature into Arabic, which undoubtedly had an influence on the development of Islamic philosophy.[28]

Obviously, these translations were controversial, such that many Muslims questioned the necessity for Muslims to study philosophy at all. They argued that after all, Islam presents a complete practical and theoretical model of the nature of reality, and the 'first sciences' of the Greeks often seemed unnecessary and even opposed to Islam. Some Muslims also maintained that Muslims have not only the Qur'an to help them regulate their lives and theoretical queries, but have also, the hadith of the Prophet and the righteous *Khulafa'* (his immediate successors and companions) and the *sunnah,* the practices of the community. There was further the system of *fiqh,* Islamic Law, which discussed particular problems concerning how Muslims ought to behave, and the science of grammar, which explained how the Arabic language ought to be understood. There was also by this time, a well-developed system of

kalam, theology, which dealt with the less obvious passages of the Qur'an, and which sought conceptual unity in apparent difficulties arising from the combinations of different canonical texts. What need was there then for the sort of philosophy which existed in Greek, which originated from non-Muslims and was initially translated into Arabic by non-Muslims?[29]

This would not have been such a heated issue had philosophy not seemed to be so antagonistic to Islam on so many points, such as issues that have to do with revelation and limitation of human intellect. Islam believes that revelation is a divine guidance from the Almighty that cannot be questioned. Topics like unseen and the hereafter, which cannot be totally comprehended by man, must be accepted as they are. Nevertheless, the philosophy that was transmitted into Arabic at this time was profoundly Neoplatonic, which tended to agree with Aristotle that the world is eternal, that there is a hierarchy of beings with the intellect at the summit and the world of generation and corruption at the bottom, and recommended a rather ascetic system of ethics. Even more crucial was the criterion of validity which the philosophers used. This was based on reason, as opposed to revelation, and naturally brought into question the significance of religious revelation. Hence philosophy came to be seen not so much as an alternative formulation of religious truths but as a rival and competing system of thought, one which required opposition by Islam. Those Muslims who worked as philosophers had to justify themselves, and they did so in a number of ways.[30]

The first Arab and Muslim philosopher, al-Kindi, argues that there is no basic inconsistency between Islam and philosophy, just as there is no basic inconsistency between Plato and Aristotle. Philosophy helps the Muslim to understand the truth using different techniques from those directly provided through Islam. Religion is then taken to represent the route to truth available to the unsophisticated and simple believer; when compared to philosophy it is seen as a version of the truth, albeit perhaps of poorer conceptual quality. The most determined defender of this view is undoubtedly Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (d. 1198CE), with whom this form of philosophy largely came to an end in the sixth century AH (12th century CE).[31]

Falsafah and *Hikmah*

Peripatetic philosophy in the Islamic world came to have considerable importance for a fairly limited period, from the third to sixth centuries AH (9th-12th centuries CE).[32] Sometimes the distinctiveness of

this form of reasoning from the traditional Islamic methodologies was emphasised by the use of the term *falsafah,* an Arabic neologism designed to represent the Greek *philosophia.* Often, however, the familiar Arabic term *Aikmah* was used. *Hikmah* means 'wisdom,' and has a much wider meaning than *falsafah.* A good deal of *kalam* (theology) would be classed as *hikmah,* as would mysticism or Sufism.[33] Whereas much *falsafah* is defined as the knowledge of existence, wider conceptions of the discipline inclined to use the term *hikmah.* Al-Suhrawardi, the originator of illuminationist philosophy, called it *hikmah al-ishraq,* a title which was taken up later by Mulla Sadra, and which is often translated in English as theosophy.[34] This sort of philosophy involves the study of reality, which transforms the soul and is never really separated from spiritual purity and religious sanctity.[35]

Philosophy as *hikmah* has the advantage of referring to a wide range of conceptual issues within Islam. Philosophy can then deal both with the exoteric aspects of the Qur'anic revelation and the esoteric dimensions which lie at the heart of religion. Both the Qur'an and the universe are often viewed as aspects of divine revelation which require interpretation, and philosophy in its widest sense has a vital role here. Western commentators have tended to overemphasise the Greek background of Islamic philosophy, yet most of the major Islamic philosophers wrote extensively on the Qur'an and saw the role of philosophy as lying chiefly in the hermeneutic investigation of holy texts. This is particularly the case with the philosophers in Persia and India, who continued the philosophical tradition after it largely, came to an end in its peripatetic form.

Islamic philosophy is then essentially 'prophetic philosophy', since it is based on the interpretation of a sacred text, which is the result of revelation. It deals with human beings and their entelechy, with the One or Pure Being, and the grades of the universal hierarchy, with the universe and the final return of all things to God. An important aspect of this view is that it sees Islamic philosophy not as a transitory phenomenon but as a continuing tradition in the Islamic world, not as something largely imported from an alien culture but as an essential aspect of Islamic civilisation.[36]

A good example of this wider notion of philosophy lies in the controversy over the 'oriental philosophy' *(al-hikmah al-Mashriqiyyah)* of Ibn Sina (Avicenna). He is well known as an architect of a Peripatetic philosophical system, one which came to have considerable significance

within both Islamic and Western philosophy. His book *Mantiq al-Mashriqiyyin (Logic of the Orientals)* deals largely with logical differences between him and Aristotle, but also includes a reference to other works of his in which he claims to have gone in an entirely different direction from that of the Peripatetic *(mashsha'i)* thinkers. From what is available in his surviving works, a picture of the 'oriental philosophy' can be constructed.

The Aristotelian universe becomes transformed, reason is linked to the intellect, the external universe becomes interiorised, facts become symbols and philosophy itself becomes a type of *gnosis* or *sophia.* The aim of philosophy is not only the theoretical knowledge of the substances and accidents of the universe, but also the experience of their presence and instantiation in such a way as to enable the soul to free itself from the confines of the universe. The universe is experienced not as something external to be understood but rather as a succession of stages along a path on which one is travelling. The notion of this 'oriental philosophy' has played an important part in the development of future illuminationist and *Sufi* forms of philosophy, which not only seek to understand the universe rationally but also analyse the wonder we feel when we contemplate the divine mystery of that universe.[37]

The merit of seeing Islamic philosophy as broadly *hikmah* rather than as the narrower *falsafah* is that it avoids the danger of regarding it as predominantly an unoriginal and transmitted form of thought. This latter has often been the form of interpretation favoured by Western commentators, who are interested in seeing how originally Greek (and sometimes Indian and Persian) ideas reached the Islamic world and then formed part of alternative systems of philosophy. There is no doubt that an important part of Islamic philosophy does follow this path, and the study of it is perhaps more appropriately a part of the history of ideas than of philosophy. Yet it should not be forgotten that by far the larger part of Islamic philosophy does not deal with the concerns of peripatetic philosophy as such, but is firmly directed to the issues which arise within the context of an Islamic perspective on the nature of reality. Peripatetic philosophy*, falsafah,* may well enter this process, but it is far from the uncritical application of Greek ideas to Islamic issues. Although the central principles of *falsafah* have their origin in Greek philosophy, they were so radically transformed and developed within Islamic philosophy that there is no justification in thinking that the latter is merely a result of the transmission of ideas from outside Islam.[38]

Reason and Revelation

Critics of Islamic philosophy take the conflict between reason and revelation as its central issue. This is often symbolised as the struggle between Athens and Jerusalem, or between philosophy and religion. While this is far too crude to be an accurate description, it does raise an important issue which has been discussed ever since Islamic philosophy began and which is still a live issue today in the Islamic world. If revelation tells believers everything they need to know, why bother to explore the same topics with reason? There are a number of answers to this question.

First of all, the Qur'an itself speaks not only to Muslims, but to everyone who is able to read and understand it. It constantly urges the reader to consider rationally the evidences for Islam, and so places a high value on reason.[39] This is not to suggest that there is no role for faith, nor that faith will not be necessary at some stage in order to approach God, but the Qur'an does offer rational indications of the truth of what it is advocating in terms of signs and proofs. This is certainly not an argument for free enquiry in the modem sense of the term, but it is an approach which places high value on the notion of independent reason, which might be seen as sympathetic also to the practice of philosophy itself. According to the popular opinion among Sunni Muslims, Prophet Muhammad is the seal of all Prophets. This implies that from his time on, no messenger can claim divine authority. We are reliant upon the correct interpretation of the *ayat* (signs) in both the Qur'an and in the universe. The ending of prophethood means that God the Almighty expects human beings to use their reason to seek to understand the nature of reality, albeit reason which is guided by the principles of Islam. As the Qur'an says:

> We will show them Our signs in the universe, and in their own
> selves, until it becomes manifest to them that this (the Qur'an) is
> the truth.[40]

It is not as though there is competition between prophecy and philosophy, since the latter should be seen as supplementing and explaining the former. There are good grounds, then, for thinking that there is no basic incompatibility between the pursuit of philosophy and the pursuit of religion, if the reason is limited to the ambit of the Shari^{c}ah.[41]

Islamic Philosophy and Christian Scholasticism

The earlier explanation may give an idea of the wide scope of philosophical thought in Islam. And it would be a mistake to limit ourselves, as the nineteenth century European scholars did, to the study of

a few scattered Latin and Hebrew translations. In fact, if the depth and the scope of Muslim philosophers' thinking are ever to be clearly and fully understood, it must be done through an examination of the original sources themselves. However, even though not all the original texts have as yet been published and subjected to research, enough is known to convince us that the material gathered by the Muslim thinkers of the Middle Ages was greater than that gathered by the Christian scholars of that era, that the Muslim thinkers explored wider horizons, enjoyed more complete freedom, and made greater inventions and discoveries than their Christian counterparts. If, therefore, one is to speak of a Christian philosophy, or as it is better known in some circle, as Christian Scholasticism, it would be more apt to speak first of an Islamic philosophy and an Islamic Scholasticism. Islamic philosophy is to the East what Latin philosophy is to the West. The combination of these two philosophical traditions plus the scientific investigations carried out by Jewish scholars complete the history of speculative thought of the Middle Ages. In order that the true place of Islamic philosophy can be clearly understood, and a full understanding of the various stages in the development of human thought be attained, it is essential that we investigate the relationship of Islamic philosophy with ancient, medieval, and modern philosophies.[42]

Islamic Philosophy and Greek Philosophy

It is an undeniable fact that philosophical thought in Islam has been influenced by Greek philosophy. Similarly, some Islamic philosophers have adopted Aristotle's views. Furthermore, Islamic thinkers looked upon Plotinus (d. 270CE) with wonder and followed him in many respects. If a word is not repeated it dies, and who has not been an apprentice at the school of his predecessors? The twentieth century generation still relies on the scientific work done by the Greeks and Romans in a number of fields. If, however, we should go so far as to label the use and join the chorus sung by the likes of Renan (d. 1892CE) who claim that Islamic philosophy is nothing other than a replica of Aristotelian philosophy, or of some others who say that it is an exact copy of Neo platonic philosophy, we would be completely mistaken. The truth of the matter is that Islamic philosophy has been influenced by a number of factors, the result of which was the birth of new ideas and views. Just as it has been influenced by Greek thought, it has also been influenced by the Indian and Persian traditions.[43]

At this juncture, it is also noteworthy to state that the exchange and adoption of good and genuine ideas do not always imply blind imitation. Several individuals may examine a particular topic and the result of their investigations may appear in a number of forms. A philosopher may utilise some of the ideas of another philosopher but this does not prevent him from giving birth to new ideas or to wholly new philosophical systems. Spinoza (d. 1677CE), for example, clearly followed Descartes, despite the fact that he was the originator of an independent philosophical system of his own. In the same vein, Ibn Sina, even though a loyal disciple of Aristotle, put forth views never professed by his master. Each of the Islamic philosophers lived in a particular environment distinct from the environment of the other, and it would be a mistake if we ignore the influence that these particular circumstances have had on their philosophical ideas and views. Thus the Muslim world could have a philosophy appropriate to its social conditions and religious principles. As to what the nature of this philosophy is, only an extensive discussion and analysis of its main ideas and principles could provide us with the answer.[44]

Islamic Philosophy and Modern Philosophy

Today, when we are aware of the relationship between modern and medieval philosophy, on the one hand, and the influence of Islamic philosophy on European medieval thought on the other, how is it possible to ignore the influence that Islamic thought has had on modern philosophy? In this paper, our discussion also touches on some examples of this influence and relation. The similarity between Islamic philosophy and modern philosophy is so strong that one may speak of the existence of a kind of relationship between them. Without going into details, we can say that the history of modern philosophy originates with the consideration of two important issues: firstly, the significance of the experimental method, which deals with matters related to external reality; secondly, speculation, which is concerned with the rational sciences. In other words, the experimentation of Bacon on the one hand and the doubt of Descartes on the other, have been the subjects of discussion and controversy in the modern age. Moreover, it has been pointed out before that Christian Scholastic thinkers and the Renaissance philosophers engaged in experimentation and paid attention to the world of nature a long time before Bacon. Roger Bacon, whom Renan calls "the real prince of thought during the middle ages"[45] did not limit himself to carrying out chemical experiments but widened the scope of his experiments to include the world

of nature. Now if it can be shown that he had contact with the works of Islamic scientists, we can conclude that his experimental approach, or rather the origin of experimentation during the Renaissance, were both products of Islamic thought and Muslim thinkers, because they were the ones who used observatories and laboratories in order to discover scientific facts.

As for Cartesian doubt, there is evidence that it had some precedence during the Christian Middle Ages and it is believed that any study of the origin of Cartesian doubt will remain defective without any attempt to discover it in Islamic philosophy.[46] Who can say that the doubt of Descartes is not wholly or partially influenced by the doubt of Al-Ghazali? Even if we set aside the question of influence, the two philosophers are still found to think in parallel and similar terms. Similarly, there is evidence that suggests that Descartes' "cogito" is not entirely inspired by St. Augustine and that there is much similarity between it and Ibn Sina's idea of "man suspended in space."[47]

Since Christian and Jewish scholasticism, which are closely related to the Islamic world are the link connecting Islamic philosophy to modern philosophical speculation, the probability of transfer and exchange of ideas cannot be ruled out. Indeed, it would amount to hasty generalisation if, without having first properly investigated and studied the issue, we were to say that there have been no connections between the East and the West in regard to the world of thought and philosophic and rational speculation. It has been proven today that an exchange dating back to the ancient times did exist and it was renewed during the Middle Ages. What is there then to stop such a connection from existing today? Ideas and opinions cannot be imprisoned in limited geographical boundaries, their movement cannot be restricted. What was once referred to as the secret of the atom, is common scientific knowledge today in different parts of the world.[48]

Conclusion

Attempts have been made in this paper to lay bare what the Islamic philosophy is all about, which has been arguably proven as nothing but a philosophical enterprise that sees beyond the physical world and rational thoughts. It combines reason with revelation and seeks ways of harmonising the two. Since reason and revelation are viewed by Muslim philosophers as the two sides of the same coin, majority of them strove and worked towards making this understanding attain a universal acceptance among genuine and truth minded thinkers. This paper also tries to correct the erroneous insinuations in some quarters that Islamic philosophy is a

mere transmission of western ideas into Islamic realms of ideas. In the same vein, it clears the air on the misunderstanding among some people that philosophy is anti-revelation. At least, Islamic philosophy as practised by renowned Muslim philosophers mentioned above is a combination of reason and revelation, which puts human beings in a better position to be more aware of themselves, their mission on this planet and, above all, to be conscious of the Almighty Creator, who deserves to be worshiped at all times. Therefore, Islamic philosophy is an answer to the Qur'anic clarion call to the entire mankind to use their God-given intellect to seek and discover the truth within the limit of human mental power.

Notes and References

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3   Karl Marx (1818-1883), German political philosopher and revolutionist, cofounder with Friedrich Engels of scientific socialism (modem communism), and, as such, one of the most influential thinkers of all times.

4   See: Curtis Brown (2006) at <http://www.trinity.edu/cbrown/papers/>, accessed 3 January, 2012.

5   T. Nagel, What does it all mean?: *A very short introduction to philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp.22-32.

6   Ibid.

7   See Curtis Brown "Introduction to Philosophy," http://www.trinity.edu/cbrown/intro/philosophy-what.html , accessed 4 January 2012.

8   K. Khan, *The Philosophy of Islam*, New Delhi: Lahoti Fine Art Press, 1981, pp.1-3.

9   What is Philosophy, http://www.whatisphilosophy.net/, accessed 24 November 2013.

10   "Meaning, Scope & Functions of Philosophy of Education"http://mu.ac.in/myweb_test/ma%20edu/M.A.%20Edu.%20Philosophy.pd, accessed 24 November 2013..

11   S. H. Nasr, "The meaning and concept of philosophy in Islam" in *History of Islamic Philosophy,* edited by S. H. Nasr & Oliver Leaman, London: Routledge, 2003, p.22.

12   Ibid. Also see Hossein Ziai, "Islamic Philosophy (*falsafa*)" in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Philosophy*, edited by Tim Winter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 55-57.

13   Abdurrahman Badawi (ed), Fontes *sapientiae ('Uyun al-lzikmah)*, Cairo: 1954, 16. See also S. H. Nasr & Oliver, p.22.

14   S. H. Nasr & Oliver Leaman, p.247.

15   M. Mutahhari. *Kitab al-Tahsil* (ed.), Tehran: 1970, p.3.

16   S. H. Nasr & Oliver Leaman, p.23.

17   Ibid.

18   Ibid., pp.23-24.

19   Ibid., p.24.

20   Ibid., pp.24-25.
21   Ibid.
22   Ibid.
23   Ibid. Also see http://www.al-islam.org/al-tawhid/study-philosophy.htm, accessed 3 April, 2012.
24   Ibid.
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26   Ibid.
27   O. Leaman, "Greek philosophy: impact on Islamic philosophy" in S. H. Nasr & O. Leaman (eds.), *History of Islamic philosophy,* London: Routledge, 2003, pp.670-676.
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29   Ibid.
30   Ibid. Also see: <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H029.htm> (accessed 8 April, 2012).
31   Ibid. Also see Jalalul Haq, "Ibn Rushd: Between Rationalism and Mysticism", *Aligar Journal of Islamic Philosophy*, No. 11 2004, pp.1-43.
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34   H. Ziai, "The Illuminationist tradition" S. H. Nasr & O. Leaman (eds.), *History of Islamic philosophy,* London: Routledge, 2003, pp.465-475.
35   Ibid. Also see Hossein Ziai, "Islamic Philosophy (*falsafa*)" T. Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp.55-60.
36   Ibid.
37   Ibid.
38   H. Ziai, The illuminationist tradition, pp.465-475.

39   O. Leaman, "Introduction" in O. Leaman (ed.) *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp.1-21.

40   Qur'an, 41:53.

41   Oliver Leaman**,** Concept of Philosophy in Islam, <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H006> (access 15 March, 2012).

42   I. B. Madkour, *The Study of Islamic Philosophy,* trns. Shahyar Sa'adat. Also see: E. R. Jones, *The History of Philosophy* in *Islam,* London: 1903, pp.46-56.

43   Ibid. Also see Abdurrahman Badawi, "New Philosophical Texts Lost in Greek and Preserved in Arabic Translations" Morewedge, F. George, Hourani et al (eds.), *Islamic Philosophical Theology*, 1979, pp.3-8.

44   Ibid.

45   Abdurrahman Badawi, pp.46-56.

46   Ibid.

47   Ibid.

48   Ibid.