

PHILOSOPHY IN ISLAM

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overview

Theology

- beginnings and topics
- Mu'tazilism
- Ash'arism

Philosophy

- beginnings and topics
- the philosophers
- decline

Ethics: Reason or Revelation?

theology (*Kalām*)

- Area of religious knowledge that concerns matters of basic religious beliefs, proofs & defences against attacks on the foundations of Islamic faith.
- The dialectical manner by which these issues were debated and discussed (rationally) was termed *Kalām*.

- Jurisprudence: deeds and actions
- Theology: articles of belief and faith

"...Do ye not understand [rationally]?"

2:44,76 ; 3:65 ; 6:32 ; 7:169 ; 10:16 ; 11:51 ; 12:109 ; 21:10,67 ; 23:80 ; 28:60 ; 36:68 ; 37:138

"Verily (in this) are Signs for people who understand [rationally]."

2:164 ; 16:12,67 ; 13:4 ; 29:35,43 ; 30:24,27 ; 45:5

topics

From a very early stage, Muslims began to DEBATE issues concerning to matters of belief and faith:

- unity of God and His existence and attributes,
- prophecy and prophethood,
- scripture and revelation,
- and resurrection and the afterlife,
- who is a Muslim, and who is not?

Mu'tazali *Kalām* Wāṣil b. 'Aṭā' (d. 749)

- Divine unity (*tawhid*): anthropomorphic verses of the Qur'an
- Divine justice ('*adl*): free-will
- the promise and the threat
- commanding good and forbidding evil
- the intermediate position (*fasiq*)

Ash'ari *Kalām* Abu'l Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 935)

- Revelation before reason
- Not all of religion can be rationalised: vision of God (affirmed)
- Attributes affirmed & NOT interpreted metaphorically ('without how')
- Free-will and predestination, a balance?
- Occasionalism
- Muslims can be sinners, and sinning has no bearing on faith

TAUHID

- Various divine attributes, such as knowledge, power, will, life, hearing, sight and speech, could not be faculties distinct from God's essence. Thus God knows by His essence, not by a distinguishable attribute called knowledge. Otherwise, God's pure unity would be compromised.
- Question: what is the relationship between God and the Qur'an that we read and recite?
- The Mu'tazila held that the latter was created by God, since otherwise it would be identical with God.

TAUHID

- The traditionalists led by Ibn Hanbal, state that the Qur'an is the uncreated word of God.
- If the Qur'an was in the category of created things then it could conceivably be imperfect, and a divinely guided ruler, such as the early caliphs less often claimed to be, or a Shi'i Imam protected from error, might outrank it
- "Seeing God" - According to the Mu'tazila this has to be interpreted metaphorically (*ta'wil*).
- Traditionalists said that these attributes had to be held as true without asking how

JUSTICE

- Mu'tazila: God is perfectly just and thus incapable of evil. Therefore, He is bound to do what is best for His creatures.
- Al-Ash'ari: he states that to say this puts limits on God, and God has no limits since there is no one superior to Him who can impose limits on Him. What is right or wrong is so because He makes it so, not because it is inherently so, Mu'tazila believed.
- For example, if God declared lying to be morally good, it would be good. God himself does not lie, not because lying is bad but because He is incapable of lying. Therefore we can trust His promises

JUSTICE II

- Aspects of ritual are only known by Revelation.
- Ash'ari: moral obligation came only with Revelation

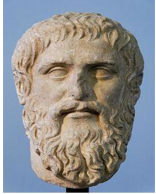
PREDESTINATION

- Predestination: the call to obey God would appear to presume the ability to choose.
- In the early decades of Islam the idea of predestination seems to have predominated, in part possibly because of a sense of the overwhelming power of God and its manifestations in the dramatic conquests.

PREDESTINATION II

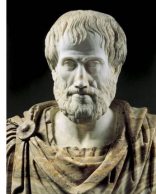
- Qadaris: hold that humans have the power of moral choice; this was taken up by the Mu'tazila. They argued that God would be unjust if He punish people for actions He had created.
- Their opponents argued that this would involve creators beside God and thus be a form of dualism.
- Al-Ash'ari: God creates actions but humans "acquire" them

Philosophy



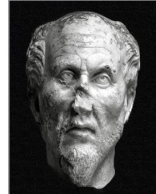
Plato (d. 348 BC)

Dialogues
- *Euthyphero*
- *Apology*
- *Republic*



Aristotle (d. 322 BC)

Logic: *Categories*
Physics: *Physics*
Metaphysics: *Metaphysics*
Ethics: *Nicomachean Ethics*
Politics: *Politics*



Plotinus (d. 270)

Enneads

PHILOSOPHY – *FALSAFA*, *HIKMA* (WISDOM)

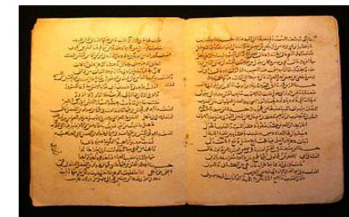
- Incorporates a multitude of disciplines, being a continuation from the pre-Socratics in Greece and continuing modified but unbroken into the Greek and Syriac world of late antiquity
- Philosophy transcended religious boundaries and often early philosophers had non-Muslims for teachers.
- Philosophy died out in the Sunni world after about 1200. Elements of it were absorbed into theology. Concepts are used by some Sufis. Philosophy continued in the Iranian Shi'i world, where its mystical side developed into a fully fledged mystical philosophy known as *irfan*.

scope

- physics / nature
- metaphysics: theories about reality
- epistemology: theories of knowledge
- ethics: moral values
- logic: principles of good, valid and sound reasoning
- aesthetics: theories of art and beauty
- mathematics
- music
- medicine

Bayt al-Hikma (House of Wisdom)

built by Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun in 833 CE



Abu Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn 'Ishāq al-Kindī (d. 873)

- mathematics, logic, cosmology, metaphysics and music



Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī: 'the Second Teacher' (d. 950)

- logic, metaphysics, politics and music
- *Al-Madina al-Fadhilah (The Virtuous City)*



Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Sīnā (d. 1037)

- medicine, logic and metaphysics
- *Al-Shifa' (The Healing)*
- *al-Qanun fil Tib (The Canon in Medicine)*



Abū Ḥāmed Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111)

- writes nearly 200 books on jurisprudence, theology philosophy & Sufism
- after theology, turns to studying philosophy (Ibn Sina):
 - 2 paths to 'Truth': revelation and reason (*falsafah*)
 - is there a need to study ancient wisdoms?
 - geometry, medicine, mathematics and logic
 - but not metaphysics
- Writes *Maqasid al-Falasifah* (Aims of the Philosophers):
 - Revelation and reason do not conflict: (Ibn Sina's *falsafah*)

Tahafut al-Falasifah (Incoherence of the Philosophers):

If someone says: "You have explained the teachings of these [people, i.e. philosophers]. Do you now say that they are of unbelief [kufr] and that the killing of those who uphold their conviction is obligatory?" We say: "It is inevitable to declare them infidels in three issues:

- First, because of the problem of the eternity of the world and their saying that the substances are all eternal.
- Second, because of their saying that God —Exalted be He! — has no knowledge of the particulars made in time by the individuals [*ashkhāṣ*], and
- third, because of their denial of the resurrection of the bodies and their assembly [on the day of judgement]." Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahafut al-Falasifah)

Abū I-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Rushd (d. 1198)

- *Incoherence of the Incoherence (Tahafut al-Tahafut)*

Taqi ad-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328)

- *Answering the Logicians (Al-Rad 'Ala al-Mantiqiyun)*

Theology and Philosophy

Theology

- Origin: Islamic -----
- scope: restricted -----
- top-down approach (truth) -----
- revelation (Ash'ari) -----
- for the masses (Ash'ari) -----
- rhetorical (dogmatic) -----
- Aristotelian syllogism -----

Philosophy

- Origin: Hellenic (adapted)
- scope: extensive
- bottom-up approach (truth)
- reason
- for the 'intellectual elite'
- demonstrative
- Aristotelian syllogism

Divine Attributes

Of some apostles We have already told thee the story; of others We have not; - **and to Moses Allah spoke direct**; - (Q. 4: 164)

((Allah)) Most Gracious is firmly **established** on the throne. (Q. 20: 5)

Verily those who plight their fealty to thee do no less than plight their fealty to Allah. **The Hand of Allah is over their hands**... (Q. 48: 10)

politics

- Very few debates / discussions at time of the Prophet & first 2 Caliphs
- Disputes arose after the assassination of the 3rd Caliph Uthman
- Flared with the '*fitna*', and those who seceded from the camp of Ali 657
- early 'groups': **Qadariyya, Murji'ah, Jabariyya & Khawarij**
- discussions about matters of belief conducted in mosques, in Basra (al-Hasan al-Basri, d. 728): the place of the 'grave sinner'

The Mu'tazila

- Basra and the rise of the science of *kalam*: schools of Basra & Baghdad
- Disputes and challenges arising from the interaction with other religions: well-founded and rationalised systems of belief
- the first **systematic** theological school
- 'those who dissociate themselves' or 'those who keep themselves apart'.
- Wāṣil b. 'Aṭā' (d. 749), and his *i'tizal* (broke away, seceded) from the circle of Hasan al-Basri (the place of the 'grave sinner')

Ash'arism and the 'decline' of philosophy

- elitism and disconnect from masses
- the *mihna*
- God's omnipotence vs. justice
- denial of causality: occasionalism

CAUSALITY

- 'everything has a cause'
- Cause > effect relationship

OCCASIONALISM

- Everything is caused directly by Allah
- World is constantly recreated by Allah (al-Ash'ari) > links to al-Ghazali

MIHNA

“*Mihna* literally means “trial, ordeal, test”; it is the term coined by medieval Arabic chroniclers to describe events that took place between 833 and 847 CE, initiated by the seventh Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun (r. 813–833)...

“Eventually, the Sunnite schools of law (*madhahib*) came to profess the uncreatedness of the Qur’an, with Ash’arism providing a standard Sunnite formulation of this theological stance. Succinctly stated, this standard Sunnite stance is that the Qur’an is God’s eternal uncreated Word; proponents of the createdness of the Qur’an, on the other hand, also believe that the Qur’an is God’s Word, but that it was created in time and formulated such that 7th-century Arabs could understand its eternal message.

To understand the implications of the two stances, recall that historical events are mentioned in the Qur’an, like the battle of Badr (624 CE). Belief in the Qur’an as God’s eternal Word suggests that the battle of Badr and its outcome were predetermined, whereas the latter position implies indeterminism—a debate known in Christianity as predestination versus free will.”

CREATEDNESS

- Qur’an is created (Allah came before His Speech) – Mu’tazilah philosophy, also followed by Shi’a Twelvers and Zaydis
- OR Qur’an is uncreated, has always existed (co-eternal with Allah)
- Sufis don’t accept the question...