
IS “ISLAMIC” PHILOSOPHY ISLAMIC?

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At the outset, I want to disown two trivializing approaches to the question that guides this chapter. One such approach responds in the affirmative, pointing to the apparent circularity of the question that is posed. The second approach answers in the negative, arguing that Islamic philosophy refers to the species of philosophy (understood as radically other than what constitutes a religious activity) that is cultivated in the Islamic civilizations. Both of these approaches trivialize the relation between philosophy and religion and I mean to underscore that relation. A perhaps more sophisticated take on the question of whether Islamic philosophy is Islamic would be to examine the claims of the various Islamic philosophers in order to determine their conformity to Islamic doctrines. This third approach, however, faces two principal obstacles. On the one hand, it is not easy to come up with a list of beliefs to which a particular philosopher in this tradition has consistently adhered, not to mention one shared by all such philosophers. This is not to say that Islamic philosophers are incoherent; it is rather a declaration that one must exercise caution in ascribing theses to any philosopher. On the other hand, it is even more difficult to subject the beliefs of Islamic philosophers to those constitutive of Islamic faith and measure their allegiance to Islam. To be sure, there are constitutive beliefs such as *tawhid*, the belief in the oneness of God; *nubuwwa*, the belief in the prophecy of Muhammad; and *ma‘ad*, the belief in resurrection and the day of judgment. But given the many possibilities of interpretation, the demands of these beliefs are not hard to meet and expanding the set of such beliefs is disputable. To be sure, there have been efforts to assess the Islamic quality of Islamic philosophy by expanding these theses and limiting their interpretations. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali’s (d. 1111 CE) polemic against the Islamic Peripatetics is perhaps one such effort and I will return to this later.

My strategy is to answer the question whether Islamic philosophy is Islamic in a metaphilosophical way—that is, I want to begin by asking what philosophy itself is. I do not pretend to be naïve about this question,

as I am not interested in proposing an account of philosophy that transcends all cultural and historical constraints; this is not to say that there is no such account. So let me be more precise about my initial step. Islamic philosophers inherited something from the Greeks and they called it *falsafa*, in close adherence to the Greek word *philosophia*. What was that something? I want to argue that the common understanding of what Muslims inherited from the Greeks involves a misunderstanding. Historians of Islamic philosophy consider Greek philosophy to be made up of bodies of rational knowledge formulated by different philosophers or schools of philosophy, but I want to argue with Pierre Hadot that for the Greeks philosophy was primarily the practice of spiritual exercises aimed at the transformation of the self and the acquisition of wisdom. I submit that this is how Islamic philosophers understood what they inherited from the Greeks. If this point is granted, then it is not hard to see that Islamic philosophy is the Islamic practice of philosophical spiritual exercises. Of course, something more needs to be said about this, and I will—by working out aspects of the prophetology that makes the philosophical way of life advanced by Islamic philosophers Islamic.

Hadot, throughout his writings and especially in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, revives the ancient distinction between philosophical discourse and philosophy itself in order to criticize the condition of modern scholarship on ancient philosophy. He writes: “Historians of philosophy pay little attention to the fact that ancient philosophy was, first and foremost, a way of life. They consider philosophy as, above all, philosophical discourse.”¹ By philosophical discourse, Hadot means the production of a “systematic explanation of the whole of reality.”² In contrast, philosophy, for Hadot’s ancient Greek philosopher, is a way of life; it is not in the service of producing a work—a rational account of reality, rather “the goal is to transform ourselves, to become wise.”³ Philosophers, as lovers of wisdom, are in training for wisdom and wisdom is not contained in a philosophical treatise, but it is a condition of the human soul.⁴ The significance of the production of systematic philosophical works (for ancient philosophers) was rather in its pedagogical role in the training of the soul. Philosophy yielded systematic texts

...in order that it might provide the mind with a small number of principles, tightly linked together, which derived greater persuasive force and mnemonic effectiveness precisely from such systematization. Short sayings summed up, sometimes in striking form, the essential dogmas, so that the student might easily relocate himself within the fundamental disposition in which he was to live.⁵

This, of course, does not exhaust the significance of rationally systematized philosophical treatises. One could think of other functions: for instance, attending to a tightly argued and systematic treatise assists the philosopher in transcending the limits of the empirical self and its preferred modes

of reasoning at the service of the appetites, mundane desires, or social conventions.⁶

Hadot’s account of ancient philosophy as primarily a way of life or as he says elsewhere, “the practice of spiritual exercises,”⁷ accentuates the centrality of ethics in the ancient philosophical enterprise. Famously, ethics concerns the good life, that is, how one ought to live, but most modern moral philosophers construe this concern as directing us to the agent’s actions and the articulation of the requirements determining the rightness or the wrongness of those actions. Depending on their preference for intrinsic goodness of acts or human interests and desires, modern philosophers can be divided into deontologists and teleologists, respectively. There are those espousing hybrid theories as well, but what they all share is a focus on actions. Modern philosophy’s act-centered ethics is to be contrasted with the agent-centered (Greek) virtue ethics where the focus is on the agent and her character. Virtue ethicists inquire into the cultivation of the character traits that allow the agent to lead the good life.⁸ In other words, the moral agent does not resort to an algorithm (deontological, consequential, or a hybrid) to figure out what to do. Her cultivation of relevant character traits enables her to perceive the good in each particular circumstance and to pursue it.

Hadot’s reading of the ancients does not simply assert the truism that their version of ethics is a virtue ethics. Rather, he claims justifiably that virtue ethics is the core of their philosophical orientation and that all of ancient philosophical production was at the service of the inner transformation constituting the good life. Even Aristotle, whose account of the highest good as contemplation culminating in thought thinking itself is often invoked to establish the priority of theory over practice, situated theory and its discursive expression in the context of the ethical cultivation of the soul. “It is sometimes claimed that Aristotle was a pure theoretician, but for him, too, philosophy was incapable of being reduced to philosophical discourse, that is, to the production of a body of abstract knowledge. Rather, philosophy for Aristotle was a quality of the mind, the result of an inner transformation.”⁹ To put it differently, for Aristotle, it is only after acquiring the practical traits of the soul (for example, temperance, courage, and practical wisdom) that one is drawn to and able to cultivate the theoretical intellect. I will get back to this point later.

In this part of the chapter, I want to look at the approaches of some prominent scholars of Islamic philosophy regarding what they take as that which the Muslims inherited from the Greek philosophers. I want to do this through the lens of Hadot’s account of ancient philosophy, because it is extremely useful in unveiling the assumptions that obfuscate the genuine sense of philosophy in the Islamic tradition. Richard Walzer, the prominent scholar of the transmission of Greek philosophy into the Islamic world, maintains that Islamic philosophy continued and preserved the Greek philosophical discourse. Walzer’s “Islamic philosophers” drew upon the

translated Greek philosophical texts and composed works that were a fusion of the views of their Greek predecessors. For him, it seems that genuine philosophy ultimately advances original theses in “rational terms” about relevant topics, and he is adamant that no such original thesis is to be found in the works of Islamic Philosophers. In the case of Abu Nasr al-Farabi (Alfarabi d. 950 CE), for instance, Walzer maintains that the latter’s theory of prophecy contains an original synthesis of Greek views on “imitation” and imagination, but he cannot help arguing, “I have not been able to find precise evidence for it in extant Greek texts although it is obviously of Greek origin.”¹⁰ Oliver Leaman is correct to diagnose a trace of Orientalism in Walzer’s views.¹¹ Drawing upon Edward Said’s influential work, Leaman argues that Walzer’s reading is influenced by a colonialist agenda. Orientalists, that is, scholars under the influence of the colonialist program, promote the colonialist agenda by arguing for the superiority of the culture of the colonizer. “Implicit in the Orientalist attitude, therefore, is the belief that the Orient had passed its golden age as the west was being born, and was thus in decline.”¹² I find Leaman’s diagnosis plausible, but surely, this is not the only Orientalist assumption exhibited in Walzer’s approach. Not only are the so-called Orientals currently in decline, but their golden age was not also anything other than an imitation of the Greek original.

It should also be pointed out that philosophical Orientalism is itself premised on the view that philosophy is the production of rational and systematic treatises. Walzer’s Greeks take the credit for the conception of philosophy as the production of rational systems and the later Europeans are credited for advancing it. Muslims, in this picture, play the role of transmitters, who lacked the rational prowess and the requisite creativity to build upon it. His philosophical Orientalism in conjunction with his commitment to the account of philosophy as philosophical discourse blinds him to the ways the Muslim philosophers sought to reconcile ancient Greek philosophical practices with their own religious commitments and exercises. As a result, Islamic philosophy is construed as a mere repository of ancient theories in order to preserve them for the later Europeans.¹³

Leaman diagnoses another manifestation of Orientalism in the position advanced by some scholars of Islamic philosophy, principally Leo Strauss, that “Islamic philosophers were not good Muslims, as philosophy and religion could not be reconciled.”¹⁴ Strauss, in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, attributes the “collapse” of philosophy in the Jewish and the Islamic traditions to the conflict between reason and religious practice. He argues that philosophy prospered in the West precisely because Christian theology, the rational defense of Christian dogma, allowed philosophical discourse an important role in the education of clerics.¹⁵ The symptoms of Orientalism are also detectable in this account. It is assumed that there was a collapse of rationalism in the East, since the tenets of philosophy are incompatible with those of Islam and Judaism. Consequently, in this view, Jewish

and Islamic traditions of philosophy became disfigured, because philosophers had to conceal Greek philosophical theories in their texts to avoid persecution by the irrational practitioners of faith, who constituted the majority of society. As a result Muslim and Jewish philosophers simply restated what they inherited from the Greeks and their major contribution was developing an art of writing that contained their accounts of Greek philosophy in disguise (so as to avoid persecution).¹⁶

Strauss’ Orientalism, like its counterpart in Walzer, presupposes a notion of philosophy as the production of rational knowledge. The identification of this assumption helps explain more of the details of Strauss’s position. Philosophy comes into conflict with religion, in his reading, because it involves rational reflection on the nature of things whereas religion is concerned with practice based on revealed (read impervious to rational scrutiny) doctrines. Perhaps the most striking evidence for his metaphilosophical commitment is his view that philosophy prospered under the protection of Christian theology.¹⁷ According to Hadot, it was precisely under these conditions that philosophy proper was marginalized.

With the advent of medieval scholasticism, however, we find a clear distinction being drawn between *theologia* and *philosophia*. Theology became conscious of its autonomy *qua* supreme science, while philosophy was emptied of its spiritual exercises which, from now on, were relegated to Christian mysticism and ethics. Reduced to the rank of a “handmaid of theology,” philosophy’s role was henceforth to furnish theology with conceptual—and hence purely theoretical—material. When, in the modern age, philosophy regained its autonomy, it still retained many features inherited from this medieval conception.¹⁸

Strauss applauds Christian theology’s appropriation of philosophy because he does not see ethics and the practice of spiritual exercises as constitutive of ancient Greek philosophy. For him, philosophy is the manufacturing of rational knowledge and it is under the tutelage of Christian theology that philosophy comes into its own (perhaps for the first time). But even if it does so, unbeknownst to Strauss, it is at the cost changing its essence. It goes without saying that he misses out on the particular character of Islamic philosophy, as a reconciliation of the practice of ancient philosophy and that of Islam.

This approach to Islamic philosophy—relying on the understanding of ancient Greek philosophy as the production of rational discourse, peppered with Orientalism—is not restricted to European and American scholars. The Moroccan Scholar, Muhammad Abed al-Jabri, in *Arab-Islamic Philosophy*, argues that philosophy *qua* production of rational knowledge declined in the Islamic world because of the influence of Persian Gnosticism. For Jabri, Arabic Islam was an ideology “committed to the service of science, progress and a dynamic conception of society.”¹⁹ Thus, it embraced Greek

rationalism. However, Persian antirationalism (that is, Gnosticism) gave rise to an assault on the Arabic tradition and resulted in its decline.²⁰ Implicit in Jabri's argument is a call to unfasten the Gnostic, especially the Shiite, element from the Islamic heritage and facilitate a renaissance of Arabism, which is nothing other than Islam at the service of reason and the European idea of progress. For Jabri, the borders of the Orient have shifted further to the East but the same prejudices are present. Jabri's view is especially awkward because it flies in the face of historical evidence. It is well known that the Persian world encouraged the pursuit of philosophy. The flowering of philosophy in the Safavid dynasty and its cultivation in the Shi'a seminaries to this day testify to the problematic nature of Jabri's account of the nature of philosophy and its history in the Islamic world.

Assigning primacy to the production of rational knowledge in defining the Greek philosophical heritage need not always accompany an Orientalist attitude. A good example of a scholar holding such a view is Leaman. As we have seen, Leaman rejects Orientalism but considers Greek philosophy as "the acme of rationality."²¹ For him, "The main purpose of philosophy is to understand arguments, and to assess those arguments and construct new arguments around them."²² He argues not that Muslims were barbarians and against reason (a favorite assumption of his Orientalist counterparts); rather he maintains that Greek philosophy was challenged by a number of other rational modes of discourse. These included Islamic theology, the theory of language, and jurisprudence, and that these modes of rational discourse had already entered the Islamic cultural scene before philosophy came along. Now this view makes some sense of the resistance offered to philosophy by a theologian and jurist like Ghazali, but it is still problematic because it misses out on the significance of philosophy as a way of life and the Islamic appreciation and appropriation of this significance.²³ So, for Leaman, Islamic philosophy is Islamic just as any other production of rational knowledge in an Islamic context is Islamic: "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 widest sense."²⁴ To be fair, Leaman admits that Islamic philosophy, when it comes into its own, "involves study of reality which transforms the soul and is never separated from spiritual purity and religious sanctity."²⁵ Here, Leaman recognizes the significance of Islamic philosophy as the practice of cultivating and transforming the soul, but he does not see its continuity (in this regard) with the Greek past. As a result, he misses out on what is unique in *Islamic philosophy*, what makes Islamic *philosophy* Islamic.

Perhaps one of the most notable proponents of the view that Islamic philosophy involves the practice of transformative spiritual exercises is Seyyed Hossein Nasr. In "the Meaning and Concept of Philosophy in Islam," Nasr claims that "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 wherever the tradition of Islamic philosophy has continued and is in fact embodied in the very being of the most eminent representatives of the Islamic philosophical tradition to this day.”²⁶ He calls the practice of spiritual exercises “the purification and perfection of one’s own being” and insists that it is constitutive of Islamic philosophy. Nasr also recognizes that the Greeks, especially the Platonists and Hermetico-Pythagoreans, underscored the relation between the theory and the practice of philosophy.²⁷ But for him, Peripateticism de-emphasizes this relation and one of the virtues of Islamic philosophy proper is the overcoming of the Peripatetic distortion.²⁸ For Nasr, the move away from Peripateticism occurs in the later writings of Abu ‘Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna d. 1037 CE), especially in what remains of *al-hikma al-mashriqiyya* (Eastern philosophy), in which Avicenna decries the follies of the Peripatetics and declares his commitment to an approach to philosophy that draws from non-Greek sources.²⁹ Nasr sees in this a revival of perennial wisdom, which involves an alliance between theory and spiritual exercises. He is adamant about the importance of ascetic self-purification and self-discovery for the true notion of philosophy:

Philosophy [without spiritual exercises] becomes sheer mental acrobatics and reason cut off from both intellect and revelation, nothing but a luciferan instrument leading to dispersion and ultimately dissolution. It must never be forgotten that according to the teachings of *sophia perennis* itself, the discovery of the Truth is essentially the discovery of one’s self and ultimately of the Self...and that is the role of philosophy.³⁰

Islam, in Nasr’s view, is an expression of perennial wisdom as it is essentially an association of theory and practice, truth and spiritual exercises, and *haqiqa* (truth) and *tariqa* (the way). So, according to Nasr, philosophy in the Islamic tradition becomes Islamic when it overcomes the Peripatetic pressures toward pure theory and recognizes the inseparability of truth and spiritual exercises. Nasr then connects Avicenna’s Eastern philosophy (*al-hikma al-mashriqiyya*) to the tradition inaugurated by Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi’s (d. 1191 CE) *hikmat al-ishraq* (Philosophy of Illumination). In the latter, the cooperation between reason and spiritual practice is central and remains so in the later Islamic philosophical tradition mainly because of Suhrawardi’s influence.

Although I agree with Nasr that certain Islamic philosophical traditions (including Suhrawardi’s Illuminism) were based on a rejection of aspects of Peripateticism, it is not correct to claim that the Peripatetics divorced theory from practice.³¹ It is likely, as I mentioned earlier, that Aristotle’s emphasis on thought thinking itself as the highest activity occasions such a reading of his work and that of his successors. A good dose of Aristotelian ethics, however, can help overcome this reading, as it becomes

apparent that for Aristotle—and the successors who took his texts seriously—the cultivation of the soul and its excellence is presupposed for the life of contemplation. In other words, it is not clear that Nasr appreciates Aristotle's virtue ethics and its centrality in the latter's philosophical heritage.³² Once we allow Hadot's thesis that all schools of ancient philosophy are focused on the practice of spiritual exercises and that philosophical discourse is only ancillary, then Nasr's assumption that Islamic philosophy becomes Islamic only in establishing a necessary connection between asceticism and theory becomes suspect. My contention is that we have to be more precise and identify the particular *way* in which Islamic philosophers established the assumed connection between theory and spiritual exercises. In what follows, I argue that this connection is established by Islamic prophetology, and that the Islamic Peripatetics were the early proponents of this prophetology.³³

I submit that it is the prophetology advanced by Muslim philosophers that makes Islamic philosophy Islamic. By prophetology, I mean the philosophical inquiry into what constitutes a prophet as the paradigmatic wise person and man of God. Of course, Islamic prophetology is "philosophical" because it establishes relevant spiritual exercises for the transformation of the soul of the philosopher. However, Islamic philosophical prophetology, *pace* Nasr, is not restricted to the Shi'a (whether Imami or Ismaili), Eastern (Oriental), Sufi, or the Illuminationist traditions; it is also present in the work of Alfarabi and the Peripatetic writings of Avicenna. Moreover, this Peripatetic prophetology is not just a theory. It has an ethical import (drawn from Aristotle's work) that is essential to my point that Islamic prophetic philosophy (including the work of Muslim Peripatetics) is an *Islamization* of philosophy as the practice of spiritual exercises.

In *De Anima*, Aristotle puts forward the notion of a transcendent Active Intellect. He maintains that "mind, as we have described it, is what it is by virtue of becoming all things, while there is another which is what it is by virtue of making all things: this is the sort of positive state like light; for in a sense light makes potential colours into actual colours."³⁴ The Active Intellect or the productive mind (*nous poietikos*) is explained through the contrast with the mind as passive (*pathetikos*), the conforming mind.³⁵ One comes to the vicinity of the Active Intellect when the ordinary intellect—the conforming mind—is freed of interests and illusions veiling reality; this freedom comes through the acquisition of virtue through spiritual exercises.³⁶ Virtuous people do not impose contingent meanings upon the objects of cognition but experience them as they are necessarily in themselves. So the conforming intellect in the attempt to approach the Active Intellect allows the potential intelligibles to become actualized. In a way, the Active Intellect produces things, as it shines like light on potential intelligibles and illuminates them. This notion of a separate Active Intellect

becomes an important aspect of the psychology of the Peripatetic predecessors of Islamic philosophy.³⁷

Islamic Peripatetics supplement the account of the transcendent Active Intellect given by Aristotle and his Hellenic followers by embracing the Platonic view that what makes things intelligible, their forms, have a separate existence. Aristotle rejected Plato's account of the existence of intelligible objects outside of the domain of the sensible objects of human experience, as well as Plato's claim that knowledge is precisely the intellectual perception of transcendent objects. He maintained that forms do not exist independently of sensible objects, but they can be separated from them in thought.³⁸ Mehdi Ha'eri Yazdi, in his insightful *The Principle of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy*, claims that Islamic philosophers believe in the harmony between the views of Plato and Aristotle and, as a result, they argue "that the mind is constituted by its nature to function in different ways at the same time; being perceptive of intelligible substances on the one hand, and speculative about sensible objects on the other."³⁹ In other words, the Active Intellect is, for Islamic Peripatetics, not just a paradigm of clear thinking; it is also the Divine Being that infuses the sensible world with intelligibility; it is the giver of forms (*wahib al-suwar, dator formarum*) in the manner of Plato's Demiurge in the *Timaeus*.⁴⁰ Therefore, intimacy with the Active Intellect not only means that one possesses a clear perception of sensible objects, but it also implies that one receives forms directly from the source rather than through the sensible intermediaries.

It is not too far-fetched to relate this synthetic (Aristotelian/Platonic) account of intimacy with the Active Intellect to the Islamic notion of prophetic inspiration. A central feature of the Islamic proclamation of faith is the belief in the prophecy of Muhammad. The Prophet Muhammad is a prophet because he was inspired by the Angel of Revelation, Gabriel, who made him recite the Qur'an in an interval of 23 years. These recitals contain the divine wisdom (*haqiqa*), the divine path (*tariqa*) to reach that wisdom, and the elements of the law (*Shari'a*) for the community of Muslims, literally those who submit to the will of God and His wisdom. Alfarabi's works represent one of the earliest attempts to connect the Islamic notion of prophecy to the Peripatetic account of the perfect man as the intimate of the Active Intellect. In *al-Siyasa al-Madaniyya* (The Political State), Alfarabi identifies the Active Intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'al*) with Islam's Angel of Revelation.⁴¹ Walzer, in his commentary on *al-Madina al-Fadila* (On the Perfect State), writes: "To know the true meaning of the Active Intellect is . . . essential, according to al-Farabi, to an adequate understanding of one of the most fundamental Muslim articles of faith, the transmission of eternal truth to mankind through a man of overwhelming mental power—a philosopher-prophet-lawgiver."⁴²

Alfarabi's philosopher is one who has set his soul in order and has subjected his thinking to a rigorous examination of ideas (aided by the light

of the Active Intellect). In a treatise titled *The Attainment of Happiness*, Alfarabi distinguishes between true philosophy and its counterfeit. He writes:

As for mutilated philosophy: the counterfeit philosopher, the vain philosopher, or the false philosopher is the one who sets out to study the theoretical sciences without being prepared for them. For he who sets out to inquire ought to be innately equipped for the theoretical sciences—that is, fulfill the conditions prescribed by Plato in the *Republic*: he should excel in comprehending and conceiving that which is essential. . . . He should by natural disposition disdain the appetites, the dinar, and like. He should be high-minded and avoid what is disgraceful in people. He should be pious, yield easily to goodness and justice, and be stubborn in yielding to evil and injustice. And he should be strongly determined in favor of the right thing.⁴³

The cultivation and perfection of character, in a manner continuous with the ancient account of philosophy as the practice of spiritual exercises, constitutes the centerpiece of Alfarabi's notion of true philosophy. For him, the acquisition of justice, the perfection and balance of the soul, paves the way for the intellectual labors of theoretical inquiry. Such a preparation allows the individual to resist extraneous goals and distractions and attend to the problems of thought and action. Theoretical wisdom gets its start from this condition of the soul.

The just person upon engaging in contemplation comes nearer in status to the Active Intellect, the Angel of Revelation. If this nearness is accompanied by a perfected imagination, then the philosopher is also a prophet, a person whose perfected imagination is active and who receives forms from the Active Intellect, the giver of forms, and from the senses. The modification of the imagination by the revelations of the active intellect allows for "prophecy of present and future events and . . . prophecy of things divine."⁴⁴ This divine creativity has been acquired by transcending the limits of the human intellect, which is merely passive in relation to sensory objects. Furthermore, we should not overlook Alfarabi's insistence that the philosopher-prophet is also a lawgiver, a skillful orator, and knows how to guide people toward the achievement of happiness.⁴⁵ The Prophet of Islam, in Alfarabi's account, would be one such person, that is, a philosopher-prophet-lawgiver, and the final one.

Avicenna adopts Alfarabi's strategy of identifying the Active Intellect with Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation. However, he modifies some of the details of Alfarabi's account of prophecy. For Avicenna's philosopher, the acquisition of a just and balanced soul must precede theoretical knowledge and the subsequent possibility of conjunction with and enlightenment by the Active Intellect. In the *Metaphysics of the Healing* (*al-Shifa*), Avicenna sets forth the conditions for the cultivation of the Peripatetic ideal of contemplative intimacy with the Active Intellect. He distinguishes between the rational,

the irascible, and the appetitive parts of the soul and argues that justice, the balance of the various parts of the soul and the sum of their excellence, is the first step toward the achievement of personal perfection.

Since the Motivating Powers are three—the appetitive, the irascible, and the practical—the virtues consist of three things: (a) moderation in . . . the appetites . . . (b) moderation in all the irascible passions . . . (c) moderation in practical matters. At the head of these virtues stand temperance, courage, and practical wisdom; their sum is justice, which, however, is extraneous to theoretical virtue. But whoever combines theoretical wisdom with justice, is indeed a happy man.⁴⁶

For Avicenna, the acquisition of justice, the excellence and balance of the soul, paves the way for the intellectual labors of theoretical inquiry. Such a preparation allows the individual to resist extraneous goals and distractions and attend to theoretical problems. Theoretical wisdom should get its start from this condition of the soul and its addition to justice culminates in happiness (*sa'ada*). However, beyond the happiness in the coupling of justice and theoretical contemplation is that including the quality of prophecy, which is attained through conjunction with the Active Intellect.⁴⁷ The benefits of this conjunction include the acquisition of first principles as well as visions brought about in the perfected imagination.

Avicenna also goes on to distinguish between the prophetic insights of the philosophers and those of the prophets. Prophets—God’s chosen Messengers—do not require the mediation of practical and theoretical perfection (as necessary in the case of the philosopher). Prophets receive this immediately from the Active Intellect: “That which becomes completely actual does so without mediation or through mediation, and the first is better. This is the one called prophet and in him degrees of excellence in the realm of material forms culminate.”⁴⁸ The prophet is God’s deputy on earth and benefits from unmediated perfection, happiness, and illumination.

Parviz Morewedge, in “The Logic of Emanationism and Sufism in the Philosophy of Ibn Sina (Avicenna),” argues that Avicenna’s view of the relation between persons and God differs from that of the connectionists, including Aristotle and Alfarabi. The latter hold that a person can, at best, achieve a connection with God by engaging in the “divine-like” activity of contemplation.⁴⁹ Avicenna, however, espouses a different mystical position, according to which the soul, after the death of the body, *unites* with God.⁵⁰ Avicenna, as I understand, maintains the Aristotelian connectionist notion in order to account for the insights of philosophers and the revelations of prophets. The union of the person and God, if Morewedge is right, is a postmortem event. It does not conflict with the idea of connection or conjunction (*ittisal*) with the Active Intellect as denoting the experiences of *living* persons. Of course, this is not to deny that the connectionist views (Avicenna’s included) do not differ in their details.

Given this peculiarly Islamic philosophy of prophecy, I want to now return to my view of the continuity between Islamic philosophy and Ancient Greek philosophy, seen as the practice of spiritual exercises for the sake of wisdom. The ideal of wisdom, in Islamic Peripateticism, gets articulated as involving some kind of ethical cultivation and growth, culminating in prophetic experiences. Of course, like all good Muslims, Alfarabi and Avicenna do not maintain that they are prophets of the caliber of Prophet Muhammad or that a prophet like Muhammad can emerge in the future. Both Avicenna and Alfarabi, in different ways, distinguish the grandeur of the Muhammadan prophetic experience from what a philosopher might attain. Alfarabi does this by attributing to the prophet a perfected imagination that yields the laws (*Shari'a*) for governing the community, and Avicenna, as we have seen, distinguishes between the qualities of insight bestowed upon the philosopher and the prophet.

It is important to realize that the Islamic Peripatetics, represented by Avicenna and Alfarabi, do not simply strap their philosophical ideal onto the Prophet of Islam. Rather, the Prophet Muhammad's words and deeds play a central role in the cultivation and the articulation of their ideal. This is again in accord with their Peripatetic heritage. According to Aristotle, ethical standards are not abstract moral principles (a view prevalent in modern moral philosophy); rather they are given by moral exemplars, the *spoudaios* or *phronimos*, that is, the practically wise person.⁵¹ One way the *phronimos* educates is by inviting adepts to imitate him, and the prophetologies articulated by Avicenna and Alfarabi are Islamic precisely because they preserve the Islamic accounts of the Prophet Muhammad's practices and sayings, as sources of imitation for the spiritual transformation of Muslims. The Qur'an and the Sunna fit into this philosophical framework and provide the relevant features of the concrete exemplar who guides the Muslim seeker of wisdom. Of course, this requires the cultivation of a relevant hermeneutic for getting at the meaning of the Qur'an and the Sunna, and such a hermeneutic is overseen by an instructor who is immersed in the spiritual practices of the religion and who knows the law. Philosophers in the Sufi and the Shi'a traditions accept the words and the deeds of the Prophet and the authority of the jurists (*fuqaha'*), but they also emphasize the importance of a living exemplar, in the figure of an Imam, the deputies of the Imam, and so on. These exemplars live the Islamic life and are in touch with the truth (*haqiqah*) of the religion. They are not full prophets in the sense of the Prophet Muhammad, but just like the accomplished philosopher in the philosophies of Alfarabi and Avicenna, they are privy to the Muhammadan truth and can be exemplars for the faithful.

The writings of Nasr and Henry Corbin⁵² are more than adequate in articulating the scope of philosophical prophetology in the traditions of Islamic philosophy. Here, I do not want to restate what they have established in their works. I want to make a case for the Islamic Peripatetics, a case that must at

the outset meet Ghazali’s challenge. It is well known that Ghazali accused the Muslim Peripatetics of being heretics on account of their adherence to three specific doctrines. To respond to this challenge, I will draw from the work of the great Andalusian Muslim Peripatetic, Abu al-Walid ibn Rushd (Averroës, d. 1198 CE). In a short work titled *The Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection Between the Law and Wisdom*, Averroës refutes Ghazali’s case against the Islamic Peripatetics by rejecting Ghazali’s understanding of philosophy as the production of rational knowledge beholden to the beliefs of its Greek founders. Averroës maintains that philosophy as appropriated by Muslims should rather be understood as a legitimate practice within the constraints of Islam.

In *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, Ghazali maintains that the Islamic Peripatetics held 20 theses that are false, three of which he considered so grave as to constitute heresy (*kufr*). Already in this account we see that Ghazali is approaching his Peripatetic rivals as heretics because of the theses they advance rather than because of their practices. The problematic theses endorsed by Muslim Peripatetics are (1) God does not know particulars, (2) the world is eternal, and (3) bodies are not resurrected. Ghazali refutes each of these theses in a painstakingly rational way, providing evidence from the Qur’an and other relevant sources. I will not relate the details of Ghazali’s arguments but rather show how Averroës, in each instance, diminishes the force of the controversy and presents the philosophers as dealing with the Islamic revelation legitimately, albeit differently from Ghazali.

To begin, Averroës argues that philosophers do not claim that God does not know particulars; they rather claim that He does not know them the way humans do. God knows particulars as their Creator whereas humans know them as a privileged creation of God might know them.⁵³ In regard to the eternity of the world, Averroës shows that the philosophers agree with Ghazali that there is a God, that God created existent things, and that the world (containing the existent things) extends infinitely into the future. What the dispute concerns is merely the past of the world. Philosophers argue that the world is without a beginning in time, whereas Ghazali disagrees. Averroës argues that the scope of this disagreement is insufficient to constitute heresy and he also introduces Qur’anic verses to defend the Peripatetic view.⁵⁴ Finally, as to the resurrection of bodies, Averroës argues that Peripatetic philosophers agree with Ghazali that the soul is immortal and that bodies are resurrected on Judgment Day. The dispute rather turns on the issue of whether the bodies that will be resurrected will be the same material bodies that had perished previously. Islamic Peripatetics argue that “existence comes back only to a likeness of what has perished.”⁵⁵ More precisely, the resurrected body is identical in its attributes to the perished body, but it is not composed of the same material. Again the point is that the difference in the position of the philosophers and that of Ghazali is insignificant and does not constitute grounds for the condemnation of the former as heretics.⁵⁶

Averroës's engagement in the above dialectical joust with Ghazali aims at mitigating the effects of the latter's attack on the philosophers and is not the substance of his critique of Ghazali. This concerns Ghazali's metaphysical assumptions. Averroës distinguishes between three forms of reasoning: rhetorical (*al-qiyas al-khitabi*), dialectical (*al-qiyas al-jadali*), and demonstrative (*al-qiyas al-burhani*). Rhetorical reasoning is the mode of discourse suitable to the public preacher and aims at persuasion by appealing to the audience's imagination and passions. Dialectical reasoning is the preferred method of the theologians, those who explore the truth through rational analysis and argumentation. Demonstrative reasoning, however, is the method of the philosopher, and it is interpretation (*ta'wil*) that gets at the origin (*awwal*) of things, in other words their truth. The first two approaches begin with assumptions shared by and *apparent* to the multitude and then proceed to others based either on persuasive or rational norms. Only the demonstrative method goes beyond appearances and gets at the real:

God has been gracious to His servants for whom there is no path by means of demonstration—either due to their innate dispositions, their habits, or their lack of facilities for education—by coining for them likenesses (*al-amthal*) and similarities of these [hidden things] and calling them to assent by means of those likenesses, since it is possible for assent to those likenesses to come about by means of the indications shared by all—I mean, the dialectical and the rhetorical. This is the reason for the Law (*al-sharʿ*) being divided into an apparent sense and an inner sense. For the apparent sense is those likenesses coined for those meanings, and the inner sense is those meanings that reveal themselves only to those adept in demonstration.⁵⁷

Demonstration is the method of getting at the reality of things, but God has provided—by means of revelation—likenesses of the real for those disinclined to engage in the demonstrative method. The Law, which includes the Qur'an and the Sunna, contains the images of the real. Theologians and preachers work on these images without seeking the originals. Philosophers, however, pierce the image and unveil the hidden original (*awwal*) through their certain interpretation (*al-ta'wil al-yaqini*). Averroës refers to the demonstrative *ta'wil* as the art of wisdom (*sin'at al-hikma*),⁵⁸ a practice that has something to do with aptitude (*al-fitra*), habit (*al-'ada*), and training (*al-ta'allum*). The articulation of *ta'wil* as an art that has to be cultivated in the person points to the practice of spiritual exercises as constituting the core of philosophy, geared toward molding the character and the mind such that one shuns images and falsehoods and becomes intimate with the source of truth, the Active Intellect. It is here that Averroës's principal criticism of Ghazali's attack on the philosophers comes out. Ghazali, according to Averroës, assesses philosophical theses as if they were theological ones (and harshly at

that). Rather, philosophical principles, according to Averroës, must be examined for their service to the practice of philosophy and the activity of aiming at the original (*ta’wil*).

Averroës’s view also suggests that philosophy as *hikma* is aligned with Islam, but Muslim philosophers have the further advantage of working with the Islamic law and practices, and are therefore capable of a more direct insight into the truth. In the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, a text devoted to a more detailed refutation of Ghazali’s attacks on the philosophers, Averroës writes:

[Islamic Peripatetic philosophers] are of the opinion that a human being has no life in this abode but by means of practical arts, and no life in this abode or in the final abode but by means of theoretical virtues; that neither one of these two is completed or obtained by him but by means of the practical virtues; and that the practical virtues are not firmly established but through cognizance of God (may He be exalted) and magnifying Him by means of devotions set down in the law for them in each and every religion—such as offerings, prayers, invocations, and similar speeches spoken in praise of God (may He be exalted), the angels, and the prophets.⁵⁹

It is evident then that Averroës follows the earlier Muslim Peripatetics in understanding philosophy as a way of life aiming at the cultivation of virtues. Moreover, this cultivation is in accord with the Islamic revelation as containing the truth and the practices leading to this truth in a way appealing to the imagination and the reason of the multitude. The reliance on Islamic law, practices, and beliefs as supplied by the revelations of the Prophet Muhammad makes Averroës and his Peripatetic predecessors Muslims. This is a point that I have explored above in dealing with earlier Peripatetic prophethology. Perhaps it would be appropriate to end this section with Avicenna’s Persian quatrain, which he composed on being accused of heresy:

It is not so easy and trifling to call me a heretic;
No faith in religion is firmer than mine.
I am a unique person in the whole world and if I am a heretic,
Then there is not a single Muslim anywhere in the world.⁶⁰

My aim in this chapter has been to argue that what makes Islamic philosophy Islamic is the philosophical prophethology advanced by its proponents. The first premise in the argument consists of the claim that philosophy as inherited from the Greeks was a way of life rather than a set of rational theories. This premise was established by reference to the scholarship of Hadot. I also surveyed accounts of ancient philosophy given by some prominent scholars of Islamic philosophy and criticized aspects of these accounts as

conflicting with the practical focus of philosophy. The second premise of the argument identifies the elements that constitute the “Islamicity” of Islamic philosophy. I argue that the central element of Islamic philosophy was not, *pace* Nasr, the combination of theory and self-transformative spiritual exercises. This combination, as I showed with regard to the first premise, was already present in ancient philosophy. Nasr’s view had as a corollary the privileging of the anti-Peripatetic posture of Avicenna’s later work and its relation to the Hermetico-Platonic Illuminism advanced by Suhrawardi. I maintain that the central element making Islamic philosophy Islamic was the notion of Islamic philosophical prophetology and that versions of this prophetology were embraced by Muslim Peripatetics. In order to emphasize the Islamicity of Islamic Peripateticism, I defend this tradition against the charge of heresy brought to it by Ghazali. I argue with Averroës that Ghazali misinterpreted the activity of philosophy (especially that of the Islamic Peripatetics) and that the charge of heresy is misplaced.

NOTES

1. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 1995), 269.
2. Ibid., 267.
3. Ibid., 268.
4. Ibid., 264.
5. Ibid., 267–68.
6. Refer to my “The Sublime Visions of Philosophy: Fundamental Ontology and the Imaginal World” *Microcosm and Macrocism*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer, forthcoming).
7. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 107.
8. I am indebted to Julia Annas’s “Ancient Ethics and Modern Morality,” in *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1992): 119–136, for the distinction between agent-centered and act-centered perspectives.
9. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 269.
10. Richard Walzer, *Greek into Arabic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), 213.
11. Oliver Leaman, “Orientalism and Islamic Philosophy,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 7 (London, U.K.: Routledge, 1998), 159.
12. Ibid., 158.
13. Another scholar of Islamic philosophy committed to this form of Orientalism is T.J. DeBoer. See his *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, trans. Edward R. Jones (New York: Dover, 1967), 28–30.
14. Leaman, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 158.
15. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 19.

16. Oliver Leaman, “Orientalism and Islamic Philosophy,” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Part II, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London, U.K.: Routledge, 1996), 1145.

17. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 19.

18. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 107–108.

19. Muhammed Abed al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy*, trans. Aziz Abbassi (Austin, Texas: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, The University of Texas at Austin, 1999), 48.

20. *Ibid.*, 49.

21. Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 16.

22. Leaman, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1145.

23. This position echoes the approach that some Indian and Pakistani scholars of Islamic philosophy have adopted. They refer to their subject matter as “Muslim philosophy” since they claim it is cultivated by Muslims and is not Islamic; that is, it is not derived from Islamic sources. An example is M.M. Shariff’s *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963–1966).

24. Oliver Leaman, “Concept of Philosophy in Islam,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 5 (London, U.K.: Routledge, 1998), 6.

25. *Ibid.*, 7.

26. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Meaning and Concept of Philosophy in Islam,” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Part I, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London, U.K.: Routledge, 1996), 24–25.

27. *Ibid.*, 23.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*, 22. Nasr admits that before Avicenna, the Ismaili philosophers had gone beyond the Peripatetics in combining philosophical theory and the practice of a virtuous life, see *ibid.*, 23.

30. Quoted by Mehdi Aminrazavi, “The Logic of Orientals: Whose Logic and Which Orient?” in the *Beacon of Knowledge*, ed. Mohammad H. Faghfoory (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2003), 48.

31. Dimitri Gutas *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 286–296, is perhaps a good antidote to Nasr’s postulate of a radical divide between Avicenna the Peripatetic and Avicenna the Oriental.

32. See for instance his alignment of ethics with the act-centered divine-command principles of the *Shari‘a* in “Islamic Philosophy—Reorientation or Re-understanding,” in *Islamic Life and Thought* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1981), 155.

33. Prophetology assumes a central place in the discussion of Islamic philosophy through the efforts of Henry Corbin [see *History of Islamic Philosophy*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (London, U.K.: Kegan Paul, 1993), 21; see also Nasr’s “The Qur’an and Hadith as Source and Inspiration of Islamic Philosophy,” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Part I, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London, U.K.: Routledge, 1996), 28 and 38 fn. 3].

34. Aristotle, "De Anima," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, trans. W.D. Ross (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 430a 14–17.
35. Ibid., 430a 25.
36. Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002), 79.
37. Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroës, on Intellect* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford university Press, 1992), 13–14.
38. Aristotle, "De Anima," 427–429.
39. Mehdi Ha'eri Yazdi, *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 9.
40. Plato, "Timaeus," in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962), 29e–30c.
41. Abu Nasr al-Farabi, *On the Perfect State*, trans. Richard Walzer (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1985), 406.
42. Ibid., 406.
43. Abu Nasr al-Farabi, "The Attainment of Happiness," in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, eds. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1961), 80.
44. Al-Farabi, *On the Perfect State*, 225.
45. Ibid., 247.
46. Avicenna, "Healing: Metaphysics X," in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, 110.
47. Ibid.
48. Avicenna, "On the Proof of Prophecies and the Interpretation of the Prophets' Symbols and Metaphors," in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, 115.
49. Parviz Morewedge, "The Logic of Emanationism and Sufism in the Philosophy of Ibn Sina (Avicenna)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92, no. 1 (1972): 7–8.
50. Ibid., 8.
51. Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, trans. W.D. Ross (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984) 1140a25–28, 1143b21–25.
52. See especially his *History of Islamic Philosophy*.
53. Averroës, *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*, trans. and ed. Charles E. Butterworth (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), 13.
54. Ibid., 16.
55. Ibid., 46.
56. Ibid., 20–21.
57. Ibid., 19.
58. Ibid., 26.
59. Ibid., 43–44 [The translation is modified at places in keeping with Averroës, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, trans. and ed. Simon Van Den Bergh (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1954), 539].

60. S.H. Barani, trans. “Ibn Sina and Alberuni,” in *Avicenna Commemoration Volume* (Calcutta, Iran Society, 1956), 8 (with certain modifications by S.H. Nasr; refer to his “The Qur’an and *Hadith* as Source and Inspiration of Islamic Philosophy,” 38 fn. 2). Mehdi Aminrazavi, in “The Logic of Orientals: Whose Logic and Which Orient?” 48–49, argues against the significance of asceticism in Avicenna’s personal life. I disagree with his analysis and refer the reader to Dimitri Gutas’ discussion of Avicenna’s practices in *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 157–194.

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