

Richard C. Taylor, Luis Xavier López-Farjeat (eds.). *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 2016. 434 pages. ISBN: 9780415881609.

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We are living in a golden age for the study of Islamic philosophy. Reliable critical editions are available to us – not to say that all editions are so today (and we still have only a tiny percentage of manuscript works rendered into published editions), but the situation is better than it ever has been. Informative introductions to a range of classical to modern thinkers can be profitably used in the classroom. And we also have a fuller notion of the long intellectual history of the life of the mind in Islam, one that includes the later period in the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal contexts and beyond. Perhaps most importantly, the philosophical significance of arguments and their consequences are taken seriously, not just as signposts along a path to the teleological emergence of science and modern philosophy in Europe, but on their own terms as part of a global intellectual patrimony.

The book under review certainly addresses itself to the need for a philosophically sophisticated consideration of issues and deliberately avoids a chronological (and perhaps overly philological) approach. But it is precisely the broad avoidance of the later period's contributions that is my major disappointment – Islamic philosophy seems to emerge from the volume as an artifact of the past, a time when all of the issues and doctrines were settled. In fact, as many scholars working on what is being called “post-classical” philosophy (itself a rather vague periodization) would argue, commentary traditions of the later period were the dynamic that developed philosophy, for glosses were not merely expositions and defenses of past doctrine, but rather a vehicle for articulating and advocating new emphases and directions for intellectual inquiry.

For whatever reason – perhaps market led, perhaps student led – we are also living in the age of the handbook, a format that continues to proliferate due to

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the fact that major publishers promote it. Thus this *Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy* will no doubt be compared with the briefer, earlier *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*<sup>1</sup> (one of whose editors is also an editor of this volume) and the recent *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*<sup>2</sup>. The remit of such work is to make it easy for the student and general reader to distil the fruits of recent, cutting-edge research and make accessible the major ideas and tendencies in Islamic philosophy.

The volume is divided into seven thematic parts: issues related to revelation and theology, logic and language, natural philosophy, metaphysics, epistemology and the philosophy of the mind, ethics and political philosophy, and that rather thorny issue of the relationship with religion and mysticism. Of course, such a volume ought to consider what is meant by Islamic philosophy or philosophy in the Arabic/Islamic tradition. It is there in the introduction, but far too briefly. The editors clarify that they want to bring out the classical thinkers' philosophical insights so they can become part of the conversation in philosophy and the history of philosophy on perennial issues. Interestingly, they identify the *falsafa* tradition – best represented in the forms of modified, somewhat neoplatonising Aristotelianism found in the work of al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Avicenna (d. 428/1037) – as the best partners in that conversation.

However, while the choice of the term *conversation* is more judicious than *dialogue*, it still begs the question about how we make philosophical traditions from different cultural contexts engage in conversation with one another. And does that not raise further problems – not only of the reification and falsification of concepts and arguments, but also of the old problem of incommensurability? Surely it is better to say how one might define philosophy in terms of a tradition and then leave it up to readers to decide how their contributions might speak to the concern of a globalizing tradition of philosophy in which the very concept of philosophy need not be wholly and exclusively tied to something that remains at heart a Greek heritage that Justin Smith, in a recent book, calls *philosophia*.<sup>3</sup> Of course, any conversation between Islamic and European traditions of philosophy is easier because of their common Hellenic origins; but that still begs the question of what type of Greek thought – Aristotle or Plato, earlier or later Neoplatonism, ratiocination or

1 Peter Adamson, Richard C. Taylor (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

2 Khaled El-Rouayheb, Sabine Schmidtke (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

3 Justin E. Smith, *The Philosopher: A History in Six Types* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

mythopoesis, philosophy as a path of wisdom or a way of life, science or magic? The editors admit the absence of much of the later traditions of philosophy and say that they might be the topic of a future volume; however, it does not help when they also assert that much recent and contemporary philosophy is more engaged with social and political issues and not strictly philosophical ones (1).

And so we return to the basic contestation over what we understand philosophy to be. For far too long, the basic prejudice of those studying Islamic philosophy has been to “analytically” it, to make it speak to those studying Aristotle (d. 322 BC), Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), Maimonides (d. 601/1204) and Kant (d. 1804) from the perspective of the Anglo-American analytic tradition. Even those who prefer the later traditions have not helped the cause by asserting their intuitive, mystical and “theosophical” aspects. We need a far more radical rethinking of philosophy, of what *falsafa* is. I suggest a useful way might be to consider the concept of *ḥikma* and how it develops in different contexts over time and constitutes the umbrella term for the activity, thought, and way of life contained within different philosophical traditions.

Part I should probably be called “Rational Attempts To Make Sense of the Islamic Scriptural Traditions.” The first chapter, Maha Elkaisy-Friemuth’s “God and creation in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s (d. 606/1210) exegesis,” should probably be read alongside Michael Chase’s piece on creation in the classical tradition up to al-Fārābī, and Cerami’s on the eternity of the world. In fact, one of the interesting uses that one could make of this volume is to identify which clusters of papers go together and can be made to speak to each other. Elkaisy-Friemuth shows how the theological understandings of God’s creative agency are squared with the philosophical insistence on God as a principle from whence the cosmos issues as a logical consequence. This problematic had a long history in Islamic thought, and yet this piece only points to some of the issues of contention.

Rosalind Ward Gwynne looks at modes of reasoning in the Qur’an, which somewhat recalls Cornelia Schoeck’s earlier work on logical structures in the Qur’an and Hadith.<sup>4</sup> However, what is of greater significance is the question of how philosophers read and used the Qur’an and scripture, which speaks not just to the general question of how philosophers engage with authority, but how they might wish to communicate and “popularize” their thought in a variety of constituencies, including the scripturally minded. Azim Nanji’s piece on ethical issues is an example of

4 Cornelia Schöck, *Koranexegese, Grammatik und Logik: zum Verhältnis von arabischer und aristotelischer Urteils-, Konzeptions-, und Schlußlehre* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006).

contemporary normative Muslim thought that is rather ahistorical. Toby Mayer's rich study of reason, on the other hand, is rather historically located in the classical theological debate between the Mu'tazila and the Ashā'ira. Rumees Ahmed's chapter seems to suggest that the broad absence of political philosophy in Islam after al-Fārābī (lamented by many thinkers, not least the former Iranian president Sayyed Muhammad Khatami in a major study of his) is due to the fact that jurisprudence and the articulation of law and order in the public sphere in effect took its place. The idealism of the Platonopolists was replaced by the pragmatism of the *fuqahā'*.

But as recent works on the *akhlāq* tradition and on *fürstenspiegel* suggest, political philosophy did not disappear from the Muslim world; rather, it continued alongside the more scripturalist and jurisprudential literature. This chapter should be read alongside Philippe Vallat and Steven Harvey in part VI on ethics and political philosophy. Time to flag another disappointment – part VI is almost wholly on al-Fārābī. Surely there is more to political thought and philosophy in Islam than one Platonopolis. Apart from the tradition of the *Akhlāq-i nāṣiri* studied in the Indian context by Muzaffar Alam, one searches in vain for anything on the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (the Brethren of Purity), Iqbāl, Khomeini or a range of thinkers and arguments that are located in the recent *Princeton Encyclopaedia*.<sup>5</sup>

Part II, on logic, language and science, comprises a useful chapter that surveys logic and language up to the Andalusian philosophers by Therese-Anne Druart, Terence Kleven on why the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* was part of the organon in the classical Arabic tradition (studied famously by Deborah Black<sup>6</sup>), Allen Bäck on the logical proof theory of demonstration and dialectic focused on the "greats," namely, al-Fārābī, Avicenna and Averroes (d. 595/1198), and Anna A. Akasoy and Alexander Fidora on structure and methods of the sciences. But given the vibrancy of the logical tradition that appeared later in the Ottoman and Indian contexts studied by Asad Ahmed and Khaled el-Rouayheb<sup>7</sup>, this section does not represent the state of research. How and why did logic become so entrenched that it became a substitute for metaphysics? And why in some contexts, such as the Safavid, was

5 Gerhard Böwering et al (eds.), *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Islamic Political Thought* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013).

6 Deborah L. Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1990).

7 Asad Q. Ahmed, "Logic in the Khayrābādī School of India: A Preliminary Exploration," in *Law and Tradition in Classical Islamic Thought: Studies in Honor of Professor Hossein Modarressi*, ed. Michael Cook et al. (New York: Macmillan Palgrave, 2013), 227–43; Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Relational Syllogisms and the History of Arabic Logic, 900–1900* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010).

there a relative absence of logical speculation (aside from the old puzzle of the Liar's Paradox and some related *insolubilia*)?

Part III moves onto natural philosophy. Jon McGinnis introduces us to the notion of nature and addresses the key elements of hylemorphism and causation with particular reference to Avicenna. Luis Xavier López-Farjeat examines causality in Avicenna and al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and Cristina Cerami's piece on the eternity of the world primarily considers Averroes' critique of Avicenna in his response to al-Ghazālī. David Twetten discusses motion in the classical *falāsifa*. López-Farjeat in his second piece in this section examines the problem of the *De Anima* and the relationship of the body and the soul, in particular (talking of philosophical conversations) one of the most influential and successful thought experiments in philosophy: the suspended person. I would have liked to have seen this chapter move more in the direction of considering the emergent notion of selfhood. The most obvious lacuna of this part is any discussion of time.

Part IV deals with some of the key problems in Islamic philosophy. Amos Bertolacci summarizes his work on Avicenna as the desire to establish a "science" of metaphysics. But the interesting question is what are the bounds of metaphysics and how does it relate to first philosophy, "general ontology," and theology as it emerges later – the recent work of Arnzen and Eichner is notably absent from this.<sup>8</sup> Sarah Pessin presents the key ontological position of hylemorphism by comparing the Avicennan account with the pseudo-Empedoclean account; however, it is also worth thinking about some later positions in which hylemorphism is increasingly set aside. Rollen E. Houser's piece on the existence-essence distinction in Avicenna is a solid contribution, but it does not bring out the key insight from Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) relating to the twin notions of how existence is modulated (*tashkik al-wujūd*) and how this distinction is meaningful because of the notion of mental existence (*wujūd dhihni*). Many of the later Ottoman and Safavid philosophers exercised their minds on this topic.

Richard C. Taylor's primary and secondary causality looks at the background to Avicenna on this issue from within the Arabic Neoplatonic corpus. Jules Janssens and Chase's articles on the metaphysics of God and on creation, respectively, should be read together – and alongside the recent article by Peter Adamson on

8 Rudiger Arnzen, "The structure of Mullā Ṣadrā's *al-Hikma al-muta'aliya fi-l-asfār al-'aqliyya al-arba'a* and his Concepts of First Philosophy and Divine Science. An Essay," *Medioevo* 32 (2007): 199–240; Heidrun Eichner, "The Post-Avicennian Philosophical Tradition and Islamic Orthodoxy: Philosophical and Theological Summae in Context" (Habilitationsschrift, Halle, 2009); see also Dag Nikolaus Hasse, Amos Bertolacci (eds.), *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Metaphysics* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012).

how one gets from the Necessary Existent to God.<sup>9</sup> Janssens brings out the creativity of Avicenna's argument for God's existence as a new metaphysics. One would like to have seen a companion chapter on the subsequent history of this discussion (reflected in the *ithbāt al-bāri'* genre as well as the commentary tradition on section III of al-Ṭūsī's *Tajrīd al-i'tiqād*) to see how the shifts in the consideration of divine agency, monism and logical innovations affected it. Chase presents an informative history from Philoponus to al-Fārābī and sets up the issues that are later discussed on the problem of the creation of the cosmos (*ḥudūth al-'ālam*) in texts all the way into the 19<sup>th</sup> century at least.

Part V moves onto epistemology and philosophy of the mind. The four chapters here are in a sense all analyses that arise out of the problem of knowledge in Avicenna – the relationship between the external and internal senses that he presents and the problem of how the human intellect engages with the foundation of knowledge in the agent intellect. Carla Di Martino's chapter ends with a somewhat puzzling generalization that, unlike the Greek Aristotelian tradition, Arabic philosophers were animated by the distinction between animal and human selves. Taylor's piece looks at abstraction from al-Fārābī to Averroes as an expression of Alexander's (fl. 200) influence in Islamic thought. Olga Lizzini returns to the problem of abstraction and intellection. What is missing from these accounts is Michot's useful analysis of the process in his book on Avicenna's *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād*.<sup>10</sup>

Cecile Bonmariage's chapter deals with one response in the work of Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1045/1636) that replaces Avicenna with a revival of the Porphyrian notion of the identity thesis. This is, in fact, the only example in the whole volume of analyzing a thinker after Averroes (and once again prompts us to wonder whether it really is the case that specialists think philosophy in Islam ended with Averroes). One point that could be more sharply made in her piece is that for Mullā Ṣadrā, the identity thesis not only aligns with his radically monistic internalism, but also explains why all of the faculties of perception pertain to the soul – in that sense there is little distinction between the external and internal senses. It would also be useful to link her chapter with Ian Crystal's monograph on the identity thesis in Greek thought.<sup>11</sup>

9 Peter Adamson, "From the Necessary Existent to God," in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 170–89.

10 Jean R. Michot, *La Destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne: Le Retour à Dieu (ma'ād) et l'imagination* (Louvain: Peeters, 1986).

11 Ian M. Crystal, *Self-intellection and its Epistemological Origins in Ancient Greek Thought* (Aldershot; Burlington: Ashgate, 2002).

Part VI takes us to ethics and political philosophy. Mariam al-Attar discusses the divine command theory and ends with a discussion on the purposive nature of the *shari'a*. Catarina Belo examines the philosophical and theological problem of freedom and determinism in a sort of summary of her book on that topic. Vallat considers al-Fārābī's theory of the state as the beginning and end of political philosophy in Islam. Nadja Germann's chapter on natural and revealed religion recalls Carlos Fraenkel's book<sup>12</sup> on philosophical religions. Harvey examines al-Fārābī on law and society in the absence of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Adamson analyses the ethical treatment of animals in Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 313/925), the Brethren of Purity and Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 581/1185) to demonstrate the plural voices in Islamic philosophy. But overall, as I mentioned above, despite each chapter being a useful contribution in its own, there is little consideration of what forms of ethical reasoning and political thought existed in Islam beyond the classical period.

The final part turns to religion and mysticism. The first chapter is Frank Griffel's ongoing engagement with the philosophical theory of prophecy in Avicenna and al-Ghazālī. Mohammed Rustom's chapter on the key ontological insights of Ibn al-'Arabī's (d. 638/1240) school ("philosophical mysticism") is the only other chapter that deals with post-Averroes developments. It is also the only one that seriously asks how philosophy might be articulated and communicated. The final contribution of Ayman Shihadeh on religious readings of philosophy tries to show what theologians found interesting in the *falāsifa*'s writings and briefly examines the "controversy" of philosophy and the condemnation of speculative metaphysics adhering to the authority of the Greeks found in al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. It could have gone beyond that and also considered how much Avicennan doctrine was digested and incorporated into *kalām* along with examining the "controversy" of philosophy.

Any volume that presents a collection of thematic articles must of necessity be selective, and thus it would be churlish to query just that. There is much to commend in the volume – almost all of the chapters are serious and philosophically engaging pieces of writing that will appeal and communicate to those interested in the history of philosophy. But those who might just think that Islamic philosophy is not merely a historical artifact that articulates interesting insights and arguments that speak to our contemporary analyticising concerns will be disappointed, because very little of the volume goes beyond Averroes. What was the significance of philosophy in Islamic cultures? How did forms of argumentation work? Why were commentary traditions the main vehicle for the dynamic development of thought? Where is Islamic philosophy today?

12 Carlos Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza: Reason, Religion, and Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).